THE SHOW-OFF

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A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM ALMON WOLFF

FROM THE PLAY BY

GEORGE KELLY

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Made in the United States of America

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Published October, 1924

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER I

I

IN the office there was little to distinguish Amy Fisher, little to attract attention to her among the other girls. She was pretty, but so were some of the others. Her clothes were simple and becoming; the office discouraged anything spectacular in the way of dress, less by rules, however, than by its own atmosphere.

Amy did the same thing, day after day, week after week. Each morning brought her a certain number of cards, varying little in number, and not at all in kind, which had to be sorted, checked, copied, as to certain entries upon them, and filed. It was routine work, and it was mechanical work, but there was a certain satisfaction in knowing that it wasn't unimportant; that it required intelligence to do it.

To Amy and the other girls in that particular office was entrusted a little of the work of selection and classification; to be sure, all they did was checked later, in the complex and infinite routine of a great insurance company. But it

was important that Amy's work should be well done.

She liked her work well enough. She had, so far as offices went, no standard of comparison, of course, for she had never worked anywhere else. But she heard things, and it was nice to be in an office where she was treated like a lady, and it was never necessary to fend off unwelcome attentions from men.

Amy was not the sort, however, to dislike any job or any office work. Her work, her time that she spent in the office, were not sufficiently important in her life. There was, in her view, nothing permanent about them. She knew, to be sure, that some of the girls were married, even though they went on working; that they went home, tired, to meet husbands equally tired, and to eat a dinner hastily bought at a delicatessen. But there was no such prospect before Amy. She meant to marry a man who wouldn't let her work; who could support her. It would be silly to dwell upon Amy's romanticism. She was neither more nor less romantic than most girls of her age and background. But she did dream, of course, of the lover who must be seeking her, out of all the women in the world; the knight who would appear, presently, and carry her off.

And her dreams were pleasant dreams, and useful too. They kept her happy and smiling. They prevented her from bewailing her lot. They made everything that was unpleasant, that otherwise she might have resented and rebelled against, seem temporary and unreal and unimportant. They gave her a curious poise, an assurance, trying sometimes to her family and her friends, but infinitely comforting to herself. And they sweetened her, or, rather, kept her sweet; they freed her from the sort of unhappiness and suffering that envy and jealousy are likely to bring to girls who are afraid to, or have forgotten how to, dream.

They didn't meet, though, with universal approval, those dreams of Amy's. There were times when her mother was sorely tried. For Amy had a way of forgetting things, too. Things she was supposed to do around the house. Errands she could just as well attend to at lunch time, since her office was at Eighth and Chestnut, around the corner from almost any place where one was likely to want anything.

And her father was difficult too, sometimes. He didn't put down to romanticism Amy's fondness for young men, for being out at night, for sitting up till all hours when she had a caller.

He couldn't understand that she was growing up; that was the trouble.

Her life wasn't exciting. She had a short way with most of the boys who wanted to come to see her, or take her out. She wouldn't waste her time with them. They were the sort who, when they married, let their wives go back to work, after a while, because they couldn't manage without the extra money. And Amy's marriage wasn't going to be like that.

II

But this is not the story of Amy alone. It is the story of the Fishers, of the whole family, who lived in North Philadelphia, not far from the factory where Pop Fisher worked on Number Five machine. It isn't Pop's story, so much, because his story was told, pretty well, before Clara and Amy and Joe were old enough to do things worth telling about, but he is behind the whole tale, so to speak. And Mrs. Fisher plays her part in it, and an important part. In the main, though, it is the story of Amy, and of her sister Clara, and her husband, Frank Hyland, and of Aubrey Piper, and of young Joe Fisher.

People change, it sometimes seems, much less

from generation to generation than the fashions that are followed by those who study them and make it their business to write of them. Just now it is the thing to delve into the mysteries and memories of childhood; to apply to the task the methods of the ultra-modern psychology. One must accept, to be up-to-date, a new and vastly depressing sort of predestination, highly scientific, carefully explained. One must believe that whole lives are controlled and directed by the forgotten, the whimsical and seemingly meaningless, actions of childhood.

It may be so. But to this chronicler, at least, it seems that the same line of reasoning that insists upon the economic determination of history might very well lead to studies concerning the economic determination of character. Historians will tell you that the Civil War was fought, not because of any supreme moral issue, but because of essential economic differences between the manufacturing North and a South the wealth of which lay in its cotton crop under the cultivation of slave labor. And it seems likely that the fact that Pop Fisher worked all his life at the trade he learned as a boy must have had at least as much to do with the development of his children as their infantile dreams and fantasies.

His life and theirs might well have been wholly different. He was as great a dreamer, in his time, as Amy herself, and as romantic a one. Ambition still goaded him then, before he was married. He was a living bit of that yeasty ferment that was the America of Cleveland and Harrison and young William Jennings Bryan, of Andrew Carnegie's "young men," of free silver and Coxey's army and the palmy days of Populism. He was a part of that struggling mass of heroic effort that was the spawn of the millionaires of the time after the war with Spain.

He might well have emerged from the mass, like many another man who was a boy with him. His years at a machine might have turned out to be, for him, as for others, only an apprenticeship. But great forces, as well as some little ones, worked against him. It was his misfortune that he came to maturity just when one economic era was passing and a new and wholly different one was dawning, and that his training and his instincts alike made him look backward, rather than forward. And he married while he was still young, and, very soon, became a father.

His marriage might not have been enough to hold him down. But there was a panic, too, about that time. There was a bleak year when,

all about Philadelphia, as, indeed, in every other industrial region, fires were drawn and the great stacks of the factories loomed skyward with never a wisp of smoke coming from them. And for him, as for thousands of others, that was a time when the task of just living, of hanging on and keeping his family alive until the wheels began to turn again was so great that it sapped their ambition, and they began to think in terms of fear, rather than of hope, and stored up bitter memories enough to color all their future lives.

Neil Fisher had hoped some time to have a shop of his own, that should bring him a living, and in which, at night, he might work upon ideas, devices, inventions that had taken a sort of vague form in his mind. There was in him then, deep down, a creative impulse, shy, secretive, vague, a thing he could not talk about, even to his wife. It seemed to die stillborn. But it never quite died; it seldom does, in any man, especially if he has a son.

His wife knew nothing of his hopes and dreams. He might have told her, might have looked to her for help, had it not been for that year of struggle and of bitter poverty. But there was in her — it was, indeed, her ruling

characteristic — a profound, complete skepticism. It was not cynical; all she had ever learned had fed it; that was all. She had no great hopes. She expected her man to have to work hard all his life and to have to work hard herself. She set her mind upon a few simple and feasible achievements. Their children must have a good schooling and be well brought up. They must own their home. They must keep out of debt.

Her husband's mind, instinctively and inherently conservative, if not positively reactionary, was confirmed in its tendencies by his association with her. Otherwise he might have snatched at the opportunities that lay before him even while he was looking back and lamenting those that had passed. For he could see, while he was still young, that in the era of great consolidations, of a vast expansion of industry, and particularly of the metallurgical industries like iron and steel, there was no longer a chance for a poor man to set up his own machine shop and make it prosper.

Yet, even then, a man in Detroit, one Henry Ford, was building his first automobile; that same Ford whose shops, only the other day, stamped the number 10,000,000 upon a motor.

Selden had already taken out those far-reaching patents of his. All over America men who had set up little bicycle repair shops were learning about the new horseless carriages and getting ready, even though they did not quite know it, for the steady stream of work that the roads were soon to bring them every day. But Pop Fisher laughed at the idea that the automobile would ever be anything more than a rich man's toy, and his wife scoffed at such talk as she heard.

She was like that. She had great strength and fortitude of character, but her strength was a purely negative one. She didn't have at all the ability to rush an obstacle and clear it with a leap; she had to burrow under it, or work her way, with an infinite patience, around it. Her outlook was pessimistic; to expect nothing, hope for nothing, was her way of sparing herself the pain of being disappointed.

Of the three children Clara, the oldest, was the only one much affected by her mother's temperament. In her something of the same characteristic hopelessness was to be seen, tempered, inevitably, by youth and by the vastly different associations of her girlhood — associations so different, indeed, that it was almost impossible

to believe that only a single generation had passed between Mrs. Fisher's youth and Clara's.

Clara never knew the grinding poverty that had done so much to mold her mother. Never prosperous, her parents were still, when she was growing up, well beyond the danger line; they were still paying for the house, but they had a settled, definite home. They were out of debt; there was always plenty to eat. And there was, by that time too, the comfortable sense of a reserve; there was a little money, not much, but a little, in the savings bank.

She worked for a little while before she was married, and was careful with her money, so that, when she married Frank Hyland, she had no need to be ashamed of her trousseau. And that marriage placed her, definitely and at once, in a higher economic class than that in which she had been brought up.

Frank Hyland was one of the few people about whom Mrs. Fisher was never pessimistic. She liked his quiet, pleasant way; she didn't mind his frequent fits of absent-mindedness. And she knew all about him, or, at least, all that it was necessary for a careful mother to know.

He was older than Clara; he was well into his safe and steady thirties when they were mar-

ried. He was solidly established, also, in a business way, as assistant manager of a small but prosperous concern engaged in the manufacture of machine tools of a special sort, and his prospects were excellent. He had saved money; he used some of it to buy a house when he was married, and there was always a comfortable margin between his income and the amount he and Clara spent. He was generous with her; she had an allowance, and, within reason, unlimited credit. And she was not the girl to abuse that.

If something were lacking in Clara's life, if she were less happy than she might have been expected to be, after five years of marriage, her mother was not the woman to see it. Rather, perhaps, she was not the woman who, seeing or sensing something faintly amiss, would make it worse by talking about it. She loved Clara deeply in her own suppressed fashion; the girl, especially after her marriage, was more like a friend than a daughter.

Amy, on the other hand, was all daughter, all child. Her hair might be up and her skirts down, though, when that was the fashion, Amy's skirts climbed as near her knees as she dared to let them, but she never ceased, in

her mother's eyes, to be a little girl, subject to constant scolding and supervision, and reasonably sure, given a choice, to do the wrong thing and the silly thing. Amy didn't mind; lectures left her as undisturbed as a shower does a duck. She lived her own life very much as she pleased; she had, in fact if not in theory, perfect freedom.

But it was Joe in whom the defeat of his mother's negative and pessimistic philosophy of life was most complete. Joe was, at nineteen, utterly emancipated, utterly free from those restraining influences that had played so great a part in shaping his father's life. He did not defy them nor deliberately ignore them; he literally knew nothing of their existence.

Had he been the sort of boy who, by his conduct, arouses parental watchfulness and awakens in a father or a mother the desire to assert authority, had he been, for example, the sort of boy fairly to be compared to the sort of girl Amy was, he would inevitably have faced a struggle, the outcome of which must have been uncertain. Joe might have been curbed and bitted; molded into the sort of boy his mother, certainly, would have regarded as her ideal.

More probably, though, he would simply have gone away to work out his own salvation.

But in all outward ways Joe was a strict conformist. He had the essential secretiveness of youth. He lived his own life as surely and as truly as did Amy. But his inclinations were wholly different. They made him, as a young boy, an excellent scholar, concerning whom there were never any bad reports from school; they kept him, in his adolescence, at home in the evenings. His mother always knew where Joe was. Down cellar, as a rule, where he had a little workshop, begun years before and equipped with tools and appliances bought from his first earnings — the money paid to him for running errands, for mowing lawns and tending furnaces, for all the odd jobs around the neighborhood he had always been willing and eager to do.

And he had, too, that profound and almost limitless patience that is characteristic, far more often, of the very young than of the very old, contrary to prevailing view. It is a mistake to suppose that youth is, as a rule, impatient. It is not. True impatience springs from a conviction of the relentless passage of time, the relative shortness of the years that remain for accomplishment. And that is something youth seldom

feels. Ardor and eagerness are not symptoms of impatience, nor is determination. And much of what old people are prone to call the impatience of youth is a manifestation of something quite different — its certainty that it is right.

Joe was, by trade, an electrician; he had a job with a contractor who did much work in new houses in all the suburbs of the city. He had a natural mechanical gift and hands as delicate and sure in their touch as a surgeon's. In him bloomed again that bud of inventive, creative talent that in his father had been nipped by the frosts of adversity and circumstance. He was full of ideas.

But over his father, in that father's youthful days, Joe had advantages almost beyond the power of words to describe. At his command were libraries, the great industrial museum that is one of Philadelphia's chief glories, no matter how seldom Philadelphians visit it, the laboratories of evening schools. When Joe was out at night he was reading, or working in some other way. Science, mechanics, research filled the place in his adolescent development held in most boys by girls. So far as the family knew Joe never went to see a girl; never went to a dance; scarcely ever went to a movie or a play. His

mother was well pleased that it was so; time enough later, when he'd got his start, for him to be tying a millstone round his neck. It was so she put it.

CHAPTER II

I

THE Fishers never knew just when and where and how Amy met Aubrey Piper. He burst upon them without warning, dazing them. But Amy knew him well by then; they were Amy and Aubrey to one another, although that, of course, didn't mean what it would have when her mother was a girl. There was no mystery about their meeting, though; nothing Amy need have hesitated to tell. Perhaps that was why she said nothing.

She'd seen him two or three times, at lunch time, before she met him, and she knew that he had seen her, although he made no attempt to flirt with her. Men seldom did attempt anything of that sort with Amy; there was a virginal quality about her, a sort of shy austerity, that forbade it. But she saw him, and marked him, and admired him.

He was wholly different from any of the men she knew. She put it to herself that he had style. He looked like men whose pictures she had

seen in books; novels of English life, mostly. In a world in which all men looked as if they bought their clothes at the same time from the same shop this one man stood out. She knew, somehow, that his suit had been made to order and not bought ready-made. His sack coat was long; it reached well down below his hips, although, that year, most men wore short coats. And he always wore a light-colored waistcoat, when every man she knew wore a vest of the same material as his coat and trousers.

When he took off his hat he revealed smooth, sleek hair, always neatly parted. Nothing seemed ever to disturb it. And in his buttonhole there was, invariably, a white carnation. The effect of that upon Amy was incalculable. She had never known a man who wore a flower. Englishmen did; she'd read that they did. But not Americans.

He seemed to her, the first day she saw him in the noon-time rush of Chestnut Street, as alien, as exotic, as a bird of paradise must have seemed in Fairmount Park. She did not associate him for a moment with the clerks, the salesmen, the office men, disgorged for an hour to seek sustenance against the rest of the day's work. He must, she was very certain, just have

strayed into Chestnut Street from one of the great hotels or clubs on Broad Street; the Ritz, perhaps.

But she continued to see him, always at about the same time. And once he was with a friend, walking just ahead of her, and she heard him, and knew he was no Englishman, but an American of her own stamp. He was laughing, and Amy wasn't the only one who heard him; people all about turned to look at the source of that prodigious sound.

"Sign on the dotted line! That's what I told them, Tommy, old kid! Take it or leave it — leave it or take it — believe *me,* the lad from West Philly knows his own mind!"

She was impressed. She liked his voice; rich, smooth, full of conviction of his own greatness. She thought of him, after he had passed on and been lost in the crowd. And then, one day, she met him. She was with one of the girls in the office, who had an errand to do and stopped in a drug store with Amy just long enough to have some malted milk. He was there, at the next stool, and he lifted his hat to Amy's friend — but it was at her he smiled.

"Why, hello!" said the other girl. "Meet my friend, Miss Fisher, Mr. Piper."

And she hurried away — not knowing at all, probably, what she had done.

Amy was shy, tongue-tied, embarrassed. But Aubrey knew how to put her at her ease. He held out his hand.

"Sign on the dotted line!" he said. "Knew it was bound to happen — didn't know when! Signed, sealed and delivered! How about getting away from hoi polloi for a bit? In other words, taking a walk?"

He guided her through the press and out to the comparative solitude of Chestnut Street.

"Do you — do you work around here too?" asked Amy, tentatively.

"Well, yes and no," said Aubrey. "Look — let your eye follow the imaginary line through the middle of old William Penn up there to what is known as the Broad Street station. To the left is the freight office of a corporation known as the Pennsylvania Railroad."

"Is that where you work?"

"Temporarily — temporarily. Until certain deals go through. And — oh, well, I wouldn't want to leave them in the lurch! The Pennsylvania Railroad is a pretty important piece of the business mechanism and you can't find depart-

ment heads around every corner these days!"

"My, no! It certainly must take brains to be that."

"A little judgment. That's all. But how many can you find that have it? I keep looking around in my department for some one that could do my work—and I give you my word, Miss Fisher, I get discouraged!"

He looked at his watch and started.

"Sorry! Have to get back for a conference. Big freight movement this month — every one calling for cars. How about putting on the old feed bag together to-morrow noon?"

"Well —" said Amy, hesitating. He laughed his great laugh.

"Sign on the dotted line! Well it is — well it shall be! Don't forget the name — Piper, Aubrey Piper, the kid from West Philly. Right where we met to-day? Make it an anniversary party!"

And he was off, leaving only his echoing laughter behind him, and an Amy bewildered, delighted, alive with interest and curiosity. That afternoon she besieged the girl who had introduced them with questions.

"Lord's sake, Amy, I tell you I don't know anything about him except he works for the

Pennsylvania Railroad and has a laugh like a hyena!"

"He has not! He laughs that way just to be funny!"

"All right — all right, I don't care! That's all I know about him, anyway. I met him at a dance."

Amy had to be content with that. But, after all, she needed to know no more about Aubrey Piper. Not then. It was enough. Everything about him thrilled her. His clothes, the breezy assurance of his manner, even his laugh, that made people in the street turn to stare. He was different; he was vivid; he was alive. And she knew that she interested him. Was it just a fancy that would pass? He might be a regular Don Juan; few girls, it seemed to Amy, could resist him. She didn't care. Time enough to think about all that later. She was going to have lunch with him next day.

II

From the first Amy realized that about her friendship — it was the word she used herself, in her thoughts — with Aubrey Piper there was something different from anything she had ever

known. He was boisterous; he was always joking; always using long words she wasn't quite sure she understood. But there was a serious undercurrent, too, of which she was always conscious. There was a sort of gallantry about him that she had never seen before, that set him apart from all the boys who had been her suitors. And he had grave moments; moments in which he sat still, thinking, while she watched him in fascination, wondering what was in his mind.

He was older than she; as old, nearly, as Frank Hyland, she thought. But he was far more distinguished than Frank. And he had something to say for himself. He didn't sit around mooning, as Frank was always doing, not hearing anything people said to him. If she were Clara, Amy thought, she'd go mad! Aubrey was so gay, so infinitely cheerful, so absolutely proof against the impact of depressing and distressing things. And he knew so much!

You couldn't mention anything that didn't start him off. Politics, history, whatever it might be, he knew all about everything there was in the papers. And he knew important people. That very first day, at lunch, she happened

to say something about the League of Nations.

"I'm glad you mentioned that, Miss Fisher!" said Aubrey. "I've put them on the right track. I wrote a letter to Secretary Hughes, just the other day, explaining how this country could go in without giving up any of its rights. I'll show you his answer when it comes. But I think you'll read about a new set of negotiations before many days."

She saw Aubrey three or four times more, and had lunch with him, before he asked if he might not come to see her some evening. That was a request full of meaning. Amy hesitated a little. The family . . . Pop and Mom. . . . Joe'd be all right. He'd like Aubrey and appreciate him. But Pop and Mom hated any one who was different. Aubrey didn't notice her hesitation; he was busy arranging his carnation.

"I'd love to have you come. It's awfully far for you, isn't it, though?" said Amy, at last.

"Far?" He scoffed at the thought. "You don't know how far I'd go to spend an evening with you, Amy!"

She flushed with pleasure. For he meant it. Amy hadn't had much experience. But she knew that. You could tell.

CHAPTER III

I

ON a June evening, when, though the day had been warm, there was a faint chill in the night air, Clara Hyland found the front door at home unlatched and walked through the hall into the big room, possessed of no title of its own, that was the real center of the family life. It was empty; Clara stood for a moment, drooping a little and looking about. She was tired; as she stood, free from observation, she seemed to sag, as if, for the moment, she were tired of keeping up some old and elaborate pretense.

She looked about her as if she were living over some of the evenings she had passed in that room. It hadn't changed. It was a room that kept its character; that, from year to year, stayed just about the same. One door led to the hall, another to the kitchen, a third to the cellar. And there were folding doors, too, that opened into the parlor, that stiff and disused abode of ceremony, the windows of which al-

ways had be opened to air it if any one were coming, who, as "company," must be received there.

Clara sighed. She was carrying a box of candy; she laid it down, now, on the center table, placed beneath the gas fixture that hung pendent from the ceiling, and bearing a lamp fed by a long green tube from above. Pop's chair was placed beside the table, but Pop wasn't in it. Clara walked over to the kitchen door.

"Hello!" she called. "Anybody out there?"

There was no answer. But a moment later Mrs. Fisher appeared in the hall door.

"Oh, it's *you,* Clara," she said. "I thought I heard the front door open."

"You all alone, Mom?" asked Clara. "Where are they all?"

"Your Pop's gone over to Gillespie's for some tobacco. Be back after while, I guess. He stays and talks, sometimes, with the men that hang out there." She looked into the parlor, then came to Clara and kissed her. It was a familiar rite; it had no particular meaning. "It's turning warm. I declare, I don't know how you can stand that fur on you, Clara, a night like this."

"It's a summer fur, Mom," Clara smiled,

rather wanly; her mother sniffed. "And it's rather cool out."

Clara sat down beside the center table, but Mrs. Fisher continued to move about aimlessly, restlessly. Finally she went to the kitchen door.

"You out there, Joe?" she called.

"No — there's no one there," said Clara. "I looked when I came in."

"He must be around somewhere. He was here not two minutes ago." She opened the cellar door and called again. "You down there, Joey?"

Joe's voice came from the depths.

"Yes," he shouted.

"All right," said his mother and closed the door.

"What d'you want?" The voice came up faintly.

"What?"

Mrs. Fisher's voice rose shrilly. Joe and Clara answered her together.

"What do you wont?" Joe called again. And Clara, for emphasis, echoed him. "He says, 'What do you want?'"

"Oh," said Mrs. Fisher. She opened the cellar door again. "I don't want anything. I was just wondering where you were."

The door was closed again. Mrs. Fisher left it, reluctantly, muttering as she went to find her knitting.

"Spends all his time down there in that bad air! Fooling with that radio. Says he can make one himself and it won't cost him hardly anything, but I'll believe that when I see it."

"When you hear it, you mean, Mom. There's some of that candy you like."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Fisher. "Did you bring me some more of that nice candy?" She spied the box and picked it up, beginning to untie the ribbon. "I never got a taste of that last you brought."

"Why not?"

"Oh, Lady Jane took it away with her, down to the office and never brought it back. She says the girls down there ate it. But I says to her, 'I guess you're the girls that ate it,' I says. She says she didn't, but I know different — I know she did."

"Well, keep this out of sight, Mom. Don't let her see it at all and then she can't take it."

"She won't get her hands on this," said Mrs. Fisher, as she opened the box. "I promise you that! Let her buy her own candy, if she's so fond of it."

"Oh, she won't do that," said Clara, opening a magazine. "She won't *buy* much of anything if she can get hold of it any other way. Not Amy."

"Oh, isn't that pretty! Look, Clara —" Mrs Fisher tilted the box for Clara to see. "Don't that look nice?"

"They do their candy up very nicely," said Clara. "And it's good candy, too — not just all show. Frank says they just put up a lot of candy to sell to fellows that want to make a hit with girls — don't care what's inside, so it looks nice."

"I guess that's so, but this tastes good, too. My — that cover looks like Irish point lace! You'd never think it was just paper! How do they cut it out, do you know, Clara? With scissors?"

"No — oh, they use a machine! They must pack thousands of boxes every day."

"Well, it certainly looks pretty!" said Mrs. Fisher. "I think I'll put that cover away, in a book or somewhere. My — look at all the colors — look, Clara — did you ever see so many different colors?"

"It is pretty, isn't it?"

"It's beautiful — seems a pity to spoil it. Don't you want a piece, Clara?"

"Not now, thanks, Mom."

"I think I'll have one. I think I'll take one of the pink ones. I *like* them." The great decision was made; the neat arrangement of the box was broken. There was, perhaps, something symbolic about her action, but Mrs. Fisher didn't know that. "I can't get over the way they put a bit of paper around each piece. You wouldn't think they'd take all that trouble. They say they have to do all that by hand. Joe says you could make a pile of money if you could invent a machine to do it." She was eating a piece of the candy at last. "It is good," she said, with a sigh of relief. "That's nice candy, isn't it?"

"Yes. *I* like bonbons," said Clara.

"I do too. I think I like them better than most anything. I'm sorry these aren't all bonbons."

"They *are* all bonbons, Mom. There's nothing else in the box."

"They *are?* Why, I thought only the pink ones was the bonbons!"

"No, they're all bonbons in that box. I asked for them that way. You can get them like that, or chocolates and bonbons or just chocolates."

"Well, that's lovely. I'm glad I know that. I can eat any one of them I like, then, can't I?" She sat back comfortably and began to rock. "How is it you're not home to-night, Clara?"

"Oh, Frank had to go to some kind of a dinner at the Glenwood Club, and I was in town about my lamp, so I thought I'd stay and have something. Frank said he might call by here for me."

"I declare, it seems to me men are always going to dinners somewhere," said Mrs. Fisher. "Seems to me they can't talk about anything unless they've got food in front of them. It's no wonder so many of them get fat."

"Frank Hyland doesn't get any fatter."

"No, he doesn't change much. You're a lucky woman, Clara, to have him. I've felt easy about you ever since you got married."

"Yes," said Clara. Her mother didn't notice her faint hesitation. "I'm lucky, all right. Where's Amy? Upstairs?"

"Yes, she's gettin' dressed. I was just hooking her up when you came in, I guess. That's why I wasn't down here and you had to call out that way."

"Is she going out somewhere?"

"I don't know whether she is or not — I didn't

hear her say anything, one way or the other. But —" She leaned toward Clara and lowered her voice. "It's Wednesday night, you know."

"It that fellow still coming here?" There was interest in Clara's voice at last.

"Oh, yes — right on the dotted — There — listen to me! I was goin' to say, 'right on the dotted line!' Now — can you beat that?"

"Why should you — ?"

"Oh, it's him! That's what he's always sayin' — and then he laughs, like one of those things in the Zoo."

"I didn't know he was still coming," said Clara.

"He certainly is. Sunday nights too, now, as well as Wednesdays. It looks like a steady thing. And, my — you never in your life heard any one talk so much as he does! Clara, I declare, I don't see how Amy stands listenin' to him!"

"I s'pose she likes him, Mom—"

"Well, if he's her taste! Your Pop can hardly stay in the room where he is. I guess that's why he went over to Gillespie's to-night — I believe in my heart it is. So he wouldn't have to be listening to him."

"Amy takes him into the parlor, doesn't she?" asked Clara.

"She does, yes. But that's all the good it does the rest of us. She might's well leave him out here. He'll be in there five minutes, and then he'll hear some one stir in here and come popping out and telling us something about Socialism. That's all you hear — Socialism. And Capital and Labor, and how the working man don't have a chance. To hear him talk you'd think he knew something about it!"

"Doesn't he?"

"He doesn't know *anything!*" said Mrs. Fisher, vehemently. "And the Pennsylvania Railroad! That's another thing he's got to be talking about all the time. Just because he works there, you know."

"Do you know what he does there, Mom?"

"I do not! He *says* he's the head of the freight department. But as I says to our Joe, I says, 'I don't know how he can be head of anything, from the talk of him.' And Joe, he says he's just a nut. He says there's lots like him."

"I guess there are, Mom," Clara agreed.

"Your Pop can't stand him at all, Clara. Why, here last Sunday night, he told him, right to his face, that he didn't know the meaning of the *word* Socialism, even! Sakes alive, though — I'd better not be talking so loud!"

She got up and went over to the hall door and stood a moment, listening, before she turned back to Clara.

"He's apt to walk in on us, you know," she explained. "He's a great joker — likes to surprise you that way. That's what he did Sunday night. I never got such a fright in all my life! Your Pop and I was sitting here, talkin', just the way you and me are now, when, all of a sudden, I glanced up, and there he was, standing in the doorway there, doing this —"

She held up her hand and aimed her forefinger at Clara, who laughed.

"Why, Mom — you didn't let him scare you, did you?" she asked.

"Not after I saw who it was, no! But he was just like a bandit when I first saw him. Scare me! I thought the breath'd leave my body! An' then he laughed. 'Ha-ha!' he says. 'That's the time I fooled you!'"

"How long'd he been there?" said Clara.

"How should I know how long he'd been there? I couldn't tell, and I didn't ask *him,* I promise you! As luck'd have it, though, we weren't talkin' about him just then, though we had been, not five minutes before."

"Perhaps he heard you, anyway."

"Well, he might have. I don't know how long he'd been there, and I don't know whether he heard us, and I don't care! I hope he did; it'd be just the price of him, for being so smart!"

"Oh, you wouldn't want to hurt his feelings, Mom!" Clara protested.

"Small chance you'd have of doing that!" said Mrs. Fisher. "I don't believe he's got any, along with the way he laughs when your Pop calls him down."

"I bet Amy doesn't like that."

"You'd believe she didn't if you'd hear the way she goes on! What'd kill you, Clara, you can't say a word about him in front of her!"

"Well —"

"Not a word! And me her own mother! No matter what he says, she thinks it's lovely. Joe said that about his being a nut in front of her, the other night, and she just laughed. 'You're jealous,' she says to our Joe. 'You're jealous, that's what you are, because he can express himself and you can't!' You never heard such talk!"

"I suppose it's natural —" Clara was amused.

"Maybe, but if it is I'll tell you something isn't." She lowered her voice and put her head down close by Clara's. "And that's his hair!

You know, Clara, *I* think he wears a wig!"

"Oh, Mom — come — even if you don't like him —"

"I do, honestly — I'm sure of it," Mrs. Fisher insisted. "And our Joe, he thinks so too, and so does your Pop. But when I asked her about it, here one morning, I thought she'd take the head right off me. You never seen anybody get themselves into such a temper.

"'It's a lie,' she says. 'He don't wear a wig. People always tell lies like that about a fellow that makes a good appearance and takes some pride in how he looks, and doesn't sit around all evening in his workin' clothes.'"

"I suppose that was a crack at Pop and Joe?"

"Of course it was," said Mrs. Fisher. "But I don't care what she says, I think he does, and the first chance I get to get close to him I'm going to have a good look and make sure. You can always tell when you do that, I don't care how well they're made."

"You can't hold him while you look, Mom!"

"I won't have to hold him. He comes in here and sits down, often, while he talks, right under this light. I can tell a wig as quick as any one if I get a good look. She won't make a liar out of me!"

"Oh, Mom!" Amy's voice floated down the stairs. "Did you see anything of that blue bar pin of mine?"

"Which blue bar pin?" Mrs. Fisher called.

"Oh, how many blue bar pins have I got!" Amy shouted, disgustedly.

"I don't know how many you've got, and I don't care!" Mrs. Fisher called back. She lowered her voice. "So don't go bothering me about it." Then, overcoming her resolution, she shouted again: "If you can't find it, go look for it!"

"You always lose bar pins," said Clara.

"I don't — I haven't any to lose. She thinks all she's got to do when she wants something is to come to the head of those stairs and holler and everybody'll jump. But she'll get sadly left. I've something else to do beside wait on her from morning till night when she's home."

She chose another piece of candy and sat rocking while she ate it.

"Didn't you get your lamp yet?" she asked.

"No. That's what I was in town to-day about," said Clara, "but I didn't get it. The girl says they haven't been able to match the silk till yesterday."

"Seems like they must always use up the last

scrap of silk there is when they make lamp shades! I wish I could get something done to that one of mine there in the parlor. The wire's right out through the silk in two places now."

"Why doesn't Amy take it in some day when she's going to work?"

"Oh, ho! Why don't she!" said her mother, scornfully. "It's all Amy can do to take herself to work these days! I've almost got to push her out of the door to get her started in time."

"Couldn't she take it around when she goes out for lunch?" Clara asked.

"She says she hasn't got time at lunch time."

"Oh, she has so got time!" said Clara.

"Of course she has. It's —"

"It's only at Ninth and Chestnut, and her office is at Eighth."

"Haven't I told her so?" said Mrs. Fisher. "I says to her, I says, 'I bet if it was something you wanted to get there for yourself you'd have plenty of time!' But she won't pay any heed to what *I* say any more! And I guess, if the truth were known —"

She stopped, listening; then sighed with relief.

"All right! I thought I heard him. I guess

he missed his car to-night — he's right on the minute as a rule. He's punctual — I'll say that much for him. You know what *I* think, Clara? I think she's meeting this fellow at lunch time."

"That's sounds as if it might be serious, if she is —" said Clara.

"Well, all I know, mornin's she stands fixing herself in front of that glass till it's a wonder to me she don't drop on the floor. When you see them gettin' so particular that way, all of a sudden, there's always some reason — there's somethin' in the wind. Don't you think so, Clara?"

"It looks so —"

"That's what I say. I says to her the other morning, when she was settlin' herself there till I got tired lookin' at her, 'You must be goin' to see him to-day, ain't you?' I says, and she says, 'He must be on your mind, isn't he?' And I says, 'No,' I says; 'he ain't on my mind, but by the looks of things he must be on yours,' I says. And I says, 'Maybe, after you get him, you won't think he was worth all the bother you went to.'"

"What did she say to that?" asked Clara.

"Nothin'. Just tossed her head. I declare, though, Clara, it worries me. After all, you know, she don't *know* a thing about him, except

that he works in the Pennsylvania freight office. He did tell her that much. But she don't know whether he does or not really. He could tell her anything and she'd believe him. She'd believe him before she would me."

"That's where he works, all right. The Pennsylvania freight office," said Clara.

"How do you know?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Frank knows him."

"Frank Hyland?"

"Yes. He says he often eats his lunch at the same place, there at Fifteenth and Arch."

"And does he say he knows him?"

"Oh, he says he's seen him around there a long time. I've often heard him speak of him, but I didn't know it was the same fellow. Frank always called him Carnation Charlie. He says he's always got a big carnation in his buttonhole."

"That's the one. That's the same one! He's always got it on when he comes here, too."

"Frank says he's never seen him without it."

"I haven't, either. I guess he wouldn't feel dressed without it, not rightly dressed. And I believe in my heart that's what's turned her head. You often see things like that, you know. The worst fool of a man can put a flower in his but-

tonhole, or cock his hat on one side, or carry a cane, and there'll be half a dozen sensible women, that wouldn't have looked at him before, dyin' about him."

"Well, if that's the same one, Frank says he's absolutely *crazy*," said Clara.

"That's what your father says, too — just his very words."

"He says they're always kidding him, down around the restaurant, there, at noon time. He says they kid the life out of him, and he's either such a big fool he doesn't know it or he doesn't care."

"He don't know who Frank Hyland is, does he?"

"No. Frank didn't say anything to him about knowing Amy or being her brother-in-law, or anything. You know how Frank is. He doesn't have much to say for himself. But he says this fellow got talking to him the other day — I guess they had to sit at the same table — Frank says it gets awfully crowded in there, sometimes — and he happened to mention he was calling on a girl up this way, and her name was Fisher."

Goin' around boastin'—"

"Oh, it was all right, what he said, Mom. That wasn't it. But Frank sort of wanted to

find out about him then, and he made some inquiries about him, and then he came home and asked me did I know anything about him?"

"He's sure it's the same fellow, though, is he?"

"Well, he told him his name was Piper."

"That's the name! Piper. Aubrey Piper. How d'you suppose he got that name Aubrey? *I* never heard of such a name before, did you?"

"Yes, I've heard the name of Aubrey. It's a girl's — no, I think it's Audrey that's a girl's name —"

"Well, I never heard of it. Sounds more like a place than a person to me. Sh-sh — here's Amy coming down now."

She snatched hurriedly at the box of candy and hid it under her apron.

"Don't say anything to her now —" urged Clara.

"It wouldn't be any use! What color are you having that lamp shade made, Clara?"

II

Amy came into the room like a whirlwind. She was flushed and even prettier than usual;

long rated the beauty of the family, although some might have been inclined to maintain Clara's claims to the title, Amy had the assurance that such honors give as an aid to her looks. She had been hurrying to get dressed; her gown, one of the new and over-elaborate pannier dresses that, a little belatedly, had come down to thirty-nine dollars and fifty cents a season or so after Paris had modified the design, had given her trouble. And she had, for the last ten minutes, been conscious of the low-toned conversation below without being able to distinguish any of the words that made it up. The effort to do so, half-conscious although it had been, had tired her.

"Mom," she said sharply, "you *must* have seen that bar pin of mine! I can't find it anywhere!"

Mrs. Fisher, for once, remained unmoved. Clara and the box of candy, hidden in her lap, supported her. She watched Amy dashing about, looking aimlessly in one unlikely place after another.

"Seems to me I did see a pin of yours in one of the drawers of the buffet there the other day," she said. "Would that be the one? I don't know whether it's still there or not."

Amy hurried across the room to look. "Hello, Clara," she said. "How is it you're not home to-night?"

She was suspicious. The way the family was acting about Aubrey was enough to try any girl. Now they were bringing Clara in to spy and see him, probably! They'd better look out!

"Oh, Frank had to be out, and I had dinner in town," said Clara casually.

"Oh! Is that parlor all right, Mom?"

"Certainly it's all right! Why wouldn't it be?"

"Well, did you side it?"

"Certainly I sided it!"

"All right — all right, Mom! You don't have to make a speech about it!" said Amy.

"No, I don't! You hear her, Clara! You'd think, the way she says it, I sat here all day with my two hands as long as each other. My sakes — look at her — just look at the way she's left those drawers, with everything hangin' out every which way! Did you find it, then?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, it's a wonder you wouldn't leave those drawers the way you find them, just once!" She got up, and still holding the candy under her apron, went to the buffet and began straight-

ening out the drawers. "The rush you're always in lately —"

"Oh, Mom — you make such a fuss! Isn't that a new dress on you, Clara?" asked Amy.

"I'd like to see the kind of house you'll keep!" said her mother.

"Well, I hope it won't be anything like this one, I'll tell you that much!"

"Oh, go easy, lady! You might be pretty glad to have one half as good, if you live long enough! That is a new dress, isn't it, Clara? I was thinking I hadn't seen it on you before."

"Yes. I only got it last week."

"Stand up there till I see it."

Clara moved off obediently, turning slowly to show off the dress, while both her mother and Amy looked at it critically.

"I got it at a sale at Strawbridge's," she volunteered.

"It's a nice length," said Mrs. Fisher.

"Yes. I didn't have to have a thing touched on it."

"Look, Amy — that's what I was telling you about just the other day," said Mrs. Fisher. "Do you see the way that dress hangs?"

"Yeah."

"This was it, Clara. There was a dress on

Queen Mary in last Sunday's *Ledger* that I was saying to Amy I thought would look good on me. And it had buttons all up and down the front, the way this one of yours has."

"A lot of the new dresses are made that way."

"How much'd you have to give for it?"

"Only forty-two seventy-five — but it was reduced way down — it hadn't sold, they said. I don't see why."

"You must have plenty of money!"

"Where'd you put those roses I brought home, Mom?" said Amy, remembering them with a start and giving a final touch of the buffer to her nails.

"They're out there in the dining-room. I put them in water for you."

Amy went to get them. There wasn't much she could do about the house; you couldn't make Pop and Mom see that it needed new wall paper and that the furniture was hopelessly out of date. Flowers helped, though; they drew people's attention, so that they didn't notice other things so much. She'd read that in an article in a magazine.

"Amy!" Mrs. Fisher called after her. "I think you'd better light the light in that parlor,

if that fellow of yours is comin' here to-night. What time is it by your watch, Clara? That old clock of ours is stopped again."

"Quarter past eight," said Clara.

"Is that all? I thought it was later — thought he'd missed his car. I must tell her — he'll be here any minute now." She got up, and the candy fell from her lap. "My God — there goes the candy! Pick it up, Clara, will you? It hurts my back to stoop so. Put it out of sight. It's a wonder I didn't do that while she was in the room! Amy!"

"Yes? What *is* it, Mom?" Amy answered.

"Clara says it's a quarter past eight by her watch — you'd better get some kind of light in that parlor if that fellow's coming!"

"All right — all right, Mom! I can't do three things at once."

"That's the way she is, nowadays. You heard her, didn't you, Clara? And flowers! She brings flowers home with her, now, from the city, every night he's coming. She has to have flowers for him in the parlor! I says to her, I says, 'I bet it'd be a long time before you'd bring any flowers home to me from the city!'"

"That's another new dress on her to-night, too, isn't it?" asked Clara.

"Yeh — she got it last week. This is the first time she's worn it, though — been altering it to make it fit in the back."

"What's she getting so many new dresses for lately?"

"Oh, Heaven knows, I don't! Ask me questions I can answer! Why's she do anything? She don't know — how do you expect me to?"

"Well, that's the fourth new dress she's had since Easter," said Clara.

"Wants to try and make him think she's rich, I guess. I told her the other night she mightn't get so many after she got him — if she does."

"Mom!" Amy came in impatiently. "You need a box of matches out there."

"Is that box of matches gone already?"

"Pretty near." Amy passed on into the parlor, carrying her roses.

"I swear I don't know where all the matches go to in this house — seems to me all I do is buy matches! There — listen — Amy, be careful of them lace curtains, if you're goin' to light that lamp —"

"She's all right, Mom," said Clara. "You'll just make her nervous if you keep telling her things."

"Oh, that's all right to say — you don't have to live in the house with her! I wish you had three or four of your own growing up — then you'd know."

"I suppose I would, Mom," Clara admitted. "I — I think I'll go along, now, before he comes."

She got up and held out the box of candy to her mother.

"You'd better," said Mrs. Fisher, "unless you want to be here all night! If he ever once gets started talking, you'll never get out."

She took the candy and put it carefully away in one of the buffet drawers.

"You wouldn't mind, you know," said Mrs. Fisher, "if he'd stay there in the parlor with her. It's her he comes to see, after all! But the minute ever he hears a voice out here he's out like a jumpin'-jack, and talkin' like Bryan."

"Look out, Mom — she'll hear you —"

"Oh, let her! And he's not here yet. Now that she's down it's safe. She'll go out there in the vestibule, in a minute, and stand till she sees him get off the trolley, and then she'll come in and let him ring — so he won't think she's been waiting for him. You never seen anybody so crazy about a fellow as she is."

"I don't like it," said Clara. "I think somebody ought to tell her about him."

"What'd be the good? She'd only give you a look if you tried to say anything to her about him for her own good."

"Well, I'd say something, anyway, whether she gave me a look or not, if I were you, Mom. Remember what I'm telling you, Mom, it's you that'll have them both on your hands if she takes him."

"*I'll* have them on my hands? I'd like to know how you make that out, Clara!"

"Well, now, how else could it be, Mom? Who else would? You couldn't leave her out on the street, and that's exactly where she'll land if she takes him. You know how long Amy could keep house and get along on a hundred and fifty dollars a month."

Mrs. Fisher gave a short laugh.

"I guess I do know," she said. "Takes more than that to keep her, never name a house and a husband."

"Well, that's every penny he gets. He's only a clerk down there in the Pennsylvania freight office."

"He told her he was the head of the freight department," said Mrs. Fisher, looking worried.

"He's not, Mom; he's just a clerk, like a hundred others down there, and that's all he ever will be. Frank knows what he does, I tell you. He made it a point to find out, after he heard he was coming to see Amy here."

"Well, why don't you say something to her, Clara?"

"Why, Mom — you know how much attention she'd pay to anything I said!" Clara exclaimed.

"That's so. But she won't pay any attention to anything any one says. I know that, too."

"And she'd be wild if she knew Frank Hyland had told it. That would just put her back up."

"Whatever any one says, she says they're jealous! Jealous! And she thinks they're envious of her too, because she's getting him. So let her get him and find out. If she makes her bed, let her lie in it."

"That's just the trouble, Mom," said Clara. "It isn't always the people that make beds badly that have to lie in them. Very often some one else does."

"Well, it won't be any one around here. I can promise you that."

"Maybe not. I hope not, Mom."

"No maybe about it, I'm telling you, Clara."

"But you know how you are when Amy's con-

cerned, Mom. Oh, you go on at her yourself, but if any one else says anything you're like a hen with her chick —"

"Why, don't be silly, Clara. Do you think your father'd be listening to that rattlebrain here every night? I tell you he can't abide the sight or the sound of him."

"Well, he has to listen to him two nights a week now, doesn't he — or else go out when he comes, the way he's done to-night?" asked Clara. "Wait a minute — listen — there's some one at the door — oh, I think it's Frank Hyland, coming now."

CHAPTER IV

I

FRANK HYLAND came in quietly. He did everything quietly. He was a silent, inconspicuous man, yet there was nothing insignificant about him, nor was he at all lacking in personality. His individual quality, however, pronounced though it was, made itself apparent rather slowly; he was one of those men who impress themselves upon others only, as a rule, after a brief absence. Frank Hyland gained in stature as people thought about him rather than as they saw and talked to him.

His wife, as she turned to greet him now, was glad to see him, but she was conscious, too, of the queer, defeated feeling she nearly always had when he returned to her after some absence, no matter how brief. It was as if he had again escaped her; as if, just when she had been about to grasp some long-postponed and yet essential understanding of the man, he had been able once more to elude her. She was glad Frank had come. She was troubled about Amy. She re-

sented the trouble Amy was causing her mother — for, behind Mrs. Fisher's half-laughing thrusts at Aubrey Piper, Clara recognized, readily enough, the evidences of a real and deep concern. And she felt concern herself. What Frank had told her about the man troubled her.

Clara didn't want Amy to settle down into the gray, drab life of an attic home. She didn't want her sister's loveliness to be sacrificed to the making of a little more comfort and pleasure for such a boastful failure as, from all she heard, she believed Piper must be. Clara's eyes were open; she had seen enough of the life about her to recognize certain symptoms, to be able to foresee, accurately enough, what was likely to come of such a marriage as Amy, only too plainly, had in contemplation.

Clara had loved Amy since her birth with a curious, secret passion, more and more suppressed as Amy grew up, but, of late, admitted freely in her own thoughts. There was a radiant quality about Amy's beauty that the quieter, darker Clara had always loved; strangely enough, she had never envied it. And she had perceived in Amy, too, a capacity for happiness far greater than her own. Clara would never,

even in her thoughts, have put it so — but what was really in her feeling was that Amy still had within her reach what life had shown to her, to Clara, and snatched away before she had been able to grasp it — the possibility, that was, of true romance, of one of the great adventures of living and loving.

Could she achieve anything of the sort with such a man as all she had heard of him made her believe Aubrey Piper must be? It seemed impossible. For Amy marriage should be a happy thing, a care-free mating, a blithe mingling of two spirits. It should not be touched with the dross of poverty. But Clara knew, or thought she knew, that she must stand alone in thinking thus. It would not be her mother's view. Mrs. Fisher was, in many ways, of an old, stern school of thought, believing in the value of discipline and poverty, regarding life not as a joyous adventure, but as a pilgrimage upon the long, hard road of duty.

Clara looked at her husband, now, with something like despair in her eyes. If only he would understand! He could help, she believed. Help her, help Amy — help Aubrey Piper, really, in the end, if Clara's forebodings were justified, for Clara had no illusions; Amy would never make a

man happy if she came to believe she had made a mistake in marrying him. Yet she did not know what to say or do; how to enlist his interest and aid.

"Hello, Frank," said Mrs. Fisher.

"Hello, Mother," Frank answered listlessly. "Am I late, Clara? I guess I am — couldn't get away as early as I thought I would."

"I was just going — I thought maybe you'd decided not to come."

"Frank," said Mrs. Fisher, "Clara says you know this fellow that is coming to see our Amy?"

"Who's that — Piper?"

"Yes — the one that does all the talkin'."

"Oh, yes, I know him," said Frank.

"I think he's crazy, Frank." He laughed a little, and Mrs. Fisher shook her head doggedly. "I do so — and Joe and Pop says they do too. The way he talks and goes on!"

"There's something off about him, Frank," said Clara. "Mom says he told Amy he was head of the freight department in the Pennsylvania Railroad."

"Yes, he did, Frank, honestly he did. She believes him, too. But Clara says *you* say he isn't anything but a clerk down there."

"That's all he is, Mom," said Clara. "Isn't he, Frank?"

Frank didn't hear. He was looking away thoughtfully. Only when Mrs. Fisher spoke again did he rouse himself.

"I beg your pardon — I didn't hear," he said. "What was that you were saying — ?"

"Mom wanted you to tell her yourself about Aubrey Piper — what he does —" said Clara, looking at him with the irritation his absent-mindedness was always rousing in her.

"He's — why, he's just a clerk. There's lots of them down there. They make out bills of lading, and check them up, and — oh, I don't know just what they do, but regular clerks' work."

"You see, Mom!" said Clara.

"Sure enough — but she'd only laugh at you if you told her that! She swallows everything he tells her. How much do them freight clerks get a month, Frank?"

He was looking away dreamily again and didn't hear. Clara's voice was slightly edged as she spoke to him.

"Frank! Mom's talking to you."

"Oh, I beg your pardon! What did you say, Mother?"

"I asked, how much do them freight clerks get a month?"

"Why — oh — about a hundred and forty or fifty a month — I don't know exactly, but not more than a hundred and fifty. It's easy to get men to do that sort of work — a lot easier than it is to find good mechanics."

"There!" said Mrs. Fisher. "Frank — what are we goin' to do about it? It looks like a steady thing."

"He's coming to see Amy twice a week now, Frank," said Clara. "Sundays as well as Wednesdays — it was just Wednesday nights at first. And I believe she sees him lunch time, too, 's often as not. At least, that's what Mom thinks, and I guess she's right."

"And if she ever takes him, she'll be the poorest woman in this city!" said Mrs. Fisher. "You know how our Amy spends money, Clara! She's got seven pairs of shoes up in that hall closet."

"Amy certainly does let her money fly," said Frank absently.

But that wasn't the right thing for him to have said. Mrs. Fisher regarded him with concentrated dislike.

"Well, if she does, she earns it!" she said. She might criticize Amy; so, up to a point, might

Clara. But let any one not of the Fisher blood beware. "She might as well have a good time now while she's young! God knows what's ahead of her."

A ring at the front door checked her. It was repeated; there were half a dozen staccato taps.

"There he is now," said Mrs. Fisher. "I know his ring." She went over toward the door and stood so that she could glance out into the hall without being seen herself. Clara rose.

"Come on, Frank, let's go now," she said. "We can go out the side door — then we won't run into him."

Frank got up, picked up his hat, and turned toward Mrs. Fisher.

"Good night, Mother," he said. She didn't answer; she was too interested in Piper's arrival. He smiled and turned to Clara. "Want to go to a picture before we go home?" he asked her.

"I don't care — we might, perhaps," said Clara.

"It's only about twenty after eight."

"Is that all? We can get in for the second show at Broad and Columbia Avenue, then."

Mrs. Fisher followed them toward the kitchen door now.

"Frank," she said, "I wish you'd talk to Amy some time and tell her what you told Clara and me. If I tried to tell her anything she simply wouldn't believe me."

"I don't suppose she'd believe me either, Mother."

"Well, I wish you would, just the same, Frank," said Clara. "You might have some influence on her — and I hate to see Amy running her head into a stone wall."

"I haven't any influence with Amy — I don't think she even likes me particularly —"

"Oh, she likes you, all right!" said Mrs. Fisher. "Just listen to him, will you!"

It wasn't hard to listen. Piper's voice, out by the front door, filled the room.

"Right on the job! Hello there, Amy!"

"Hello!" said Amy.

"The pride of old West Philly!"

"Listen to him laugh, would you!" said Mrs. Fisher.

"I'll take your hat, Aubrey," said Amy.

"Anything to please the ladies. The boy rode off with thanks and many a backward bow!" Again his wild laugh rang out. "Amy, do you know, I'm thinking of buying an airship to come and see you in!"

"It is quite a trip for you, isn't it?" he heard Amy say.

Mrs. Fisher threw up her hands. Clara stood still, her eyes drawn together. Hyland smiled tolerantly. Then Clara took his arm and drew him with her. And Mrs. Fisher tiptoed across the room, once she was alone, to stand listening by the parlor door.

"Quite a trip!" she echoed indignantly. "And why not?"

"Just one shining hour and a half, if you say it quick!" said Aubrey, his voice plainly audible from the parlor. "By the little old Brill special. And how is the Mother?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Say, Amy — wasn't that hold-up in last night's paper out this way somewhere?"

"Yes — it was right over here on Erie Avenue."

Mrs. Fisher continued to listen. She neither heard nor saw her husband come in. He stood in the door a moment, watching her with amused eyes, and then took a pipe and his pouch from his pocket and began to fill his pipe.

"Doctor's house, wasn't it?" asked Aubrey.

"Yes. Doctor Donnelly's. They got nearly two thousand dollars."

Again Aubrey laughed his raucous laugh.

"Oh, come, come, Amy! You don't expect me to believe that, do you?"

"Why shouldn't you believe it? It's so," said Amy.

"I don't believe there's that much money in North Philadelphia!"

He roared with laughter, and Mr. Fisher went up to his wife and gave her a little dig in the ribs. She started, and, smothering a little shriek, turned upon him.

"Oh, you frightened me!" she said.

"You ought to be pretty nearly frightened to death by this time, oughtn't you?" asked Mr. Fisher.

"Well, it wouldn't be any wonder if I was!"

"You've been jumpin' that same way ever since I knew you first."

"Well, what d'you come pussy-footin' in that way for when you know how nervous I am?" she demanded.

"I didn't come pussy-footin' in at all."

"You did so, or I'd have heard you, wouldn't I?"

"You'd have heard me, all right, if you weren't so busy listening to somethin' that's none of your business."

II

Mrs. Fisher turned resentfully toward her husband.

"It'll be some of my business if you go spillin' any of that dirty old tobacco on my nice new tablecloth, I'll tell you that much!"

"I'm not spillin' any — I'm smokin' it," said he, carefully brushing the tobacco from the cloth as he spoke. There was another roar of laughter from the parlor. "Who's in there — Windy?"

"Uh-huh," said Mrs. Fisher, nodding acquiescently.

"What's he doin' — laughin' at some more of them West Philadelphia jokes of his?" He took the evening paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and sat down to read.

"Yeh — I guess you'd call them jokes, if you wasn't too particular. He was astin' Amy about that robbery over at Doctor Donnelly's yesterday mornin', and when she told him the bandits escaped with their loot o' nearly two thousand dollars, like it said in the paper, he laughed, and he says it couldn't be true, he says, because there wasn't that much money *in* North Philadelphia!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Fisher mockingly.

"Sh-sh —" Mrs. Fisher was at the door again, listening. But Amy's father, settled in his chair, was growling, half to himself.

"I'll bet there wouldn't have to be much money up this way to be more than *he's* got! What's that? Joe at it again down cellar?"

Mrs. Fisher was torn. Aubrey's voice was rising again.

"Amy, you know I discovered to-night that I can save a full fifteen minutes on this trip over here by transferring up Twenty-ninth to the Lehigh Avenue car, instead of going on in and up Nineteenth."

Mrs. Fisher moved swiftly over to the cellar door and opened it.

"Joe!" she called. "Stop that hammerin'! We can't hear our ears up here, with all the noise you're makin' down there!"

Her husband chuckled, and she gave him a stony look.

"What ails *you?*" she asked. And bent her head to listen to Amy.

"I hear some people say it's a lot quicker to use the Park trolley to get out here," Amy was saying. "But it is an awful trip —"

"I don't know how they ever found this place!" said Aubrey.

But to that challenge even Amy rose.

"I don't know how *you* ever found West Philadelphia!" she said.

"Lots of people think they haven't found it yet!" Again he roared with laughter. "Lost somewhere between the Schuylkill River and Darby, I guess!"

Mrs. Fisher turned to look at her husband. But he, suddenly, was transformed. He half rose in his chair.

"Come away from there, Josie!" he shouted. Amazed and startled, Mrs. Fisher moved from the door. "Don't be listenin' to that damned blatherskite!"

"I wasn't listenin' to him," she said. "I was just seein' what he was sayin'." Her feelings were hurt, but, looking regretfully at her listening post, she picked up her knitting bag and went over toward the chair that was her special property. "He was astin' Amy how she ever found this part of town to live in, and she was astin' him how *he* ever found *West* Philadelphia. He says West Philadelphia ain't *been* found yet — that it's lost somewhere between the Schuylkill River and Darby."

"Well, I wish to God *he'd* get lost some night

somewhere between here and the Schuylkill River," said Mr. Fisher.

"No chance. What'd kill you, you know, is he always dies laughin' whenever he gets off one of them bum jokes of his — Just listen at them, will you! Now he's got Amy laughin' too, like she was goin' to have a fit of hysterics!"

"Well, somebody's got to laugh, I guess," said Mr. Fisher.

Mrs. Fisher sighed as she began to knit. She glanced at the mantelpiece.

"That old clock's stopped again," she said.

"Needs fixin'."

"It's *been* fixed twice. Don't do no good any more. I guess it's just worn out. I think it's terrible lonesome not to hear the clock. It gets to be too still in a room without it. It always sounds like soap bubbles meltin' to me."

"H'm — here's a fellow been left a quarter of a million dollars," said her husband, intent on his paper.

"Guess that happens all the time."

"Yes, but this fellow won't take it."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Nothin' at all's the matter with him — he just don't want it, it says."

"He mustn't be in his right mind, poor boy!

I wisht somebody'd leave me a quarter of a million dollars — or a quarter of that!"

"You wouldn't know what to do with it if they did," said Mr. Fisher, with a smile.

"Well, I know *one* thing I'd do with it, and that'd be to have somethin' done to that old heater of ours downstairs and not be freezin' to death all next winter the way I was last!"

In the parlor Aubrey laughed again, and Mrs. Fisher started, nervously and half eagerly, and then, with a glance at her husband, settled down again to her knitting.

"Every sweater I start I swear it'll be the last," she said. "And then I start right in on another." She laughed a little and looked over at her husband. But he was reading, and she sighed, and continued to knit. Then, struck by a sudden thought, she looked up. "Well now, Neil, what becomes of money like that, that people won't take?"

"What'd you say?"

"I say, what becomes of money like that, that people won't take?"

"Why, nothing at all becomes of it. They just come and get it."

She stared at him.

"Who comes and gets it?"

"The people that won't take it."

She looked at him, vastly puzzled and a little suspicious, for a moment. There were times, even after all these years, when Mr. Fisher's mind was too subtle for her.

"Well," she said, "I'll bet if they'd leave it to me they wouldn't have to come and take it."

"*Who* wouldn't have to come and take it?" asked Mr. Fisher, half puzzled, half irritated.

"Why, the people that won't take it!" She was angry now.

"What are you talkin' about, Josie? Do you know?"

"Yes, I do know very well what I'm talkin' about — but I don't think you do!"

"Let me read this paper, then, will you?"

The knitting needles flew faster.

"Go ahead and read it! I'm sure I don't want to talk to you! It was you that started talkin' to me — about the young man that had to go after the money because he wouldn't take it first!"

Mr. Fisher made a despairing gesture and went back to his paper. And then, up from the cellar came Joe, carrying the front panel of a radio set.

"Joe," she said, "I'm going to have that light

took out of the cellar if you don't stop spendin' all your time down there."

"Well, you don't want me hammerin' up here, do you?"

"I don't want you hammerin' anywhere. I want you to go out nights, and get some air, like other boys do, and not be cooped up in that musty old cellar all the time."

Aubrey's laughter sounded again in the parlor and Joe glanced over.

"Who's in there — the Pennsylvania Railroad?" he asked.

"Yes, and he's got about as much sense as yourself!"

"All right — all right," said Joe. He sat down opposite his father, by the central table, under the strong light, and began adjusting knobs with tiny screws and a screwdriver such as comes with a sewing machine or a typewriter. "You won't talk that way, though, when you can sit here and listen to the Grand Opera."

"I won't be listenin' to it — don't you fret. I got somethin' else to do beside sit listenin' to a lot of Dagoes singin'."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Fisher, looking over at the radio material.

"He says when he gets that radio-thing fin-

ished I can sit here and listen to the Grand Opera."

"What's that — them singin' people?"

"Yes — them that goes away up high, you know — like the ones that Clara has on her victrola."

She turned as the parlor door was opened. Amy stood there, laughing and looking back.

"Oh, it's all right," she said, "if you let it run a minute."

"What's the matter, Amy?" Mrs. Fisher asked, as Amy crossed the room, pausing before the mirror to look at herself and give her hair a pat.

"Nothing at all. Aubrey wants a drink of water, that's all."

"Oh!" She looked upward as Amy went out into the kitchen. "Now *we'll* get him! There he comes!"

Aubrey came in.

"Stay right where you are, folks — right where you are!" he said. "Just a little social attention — going right out again on the next train!"

He turned to the mirror, adjusted his tie, set his carnation more securely in his buttonhole, smoothed his hair. Mrs. Fisher looked at him

angrily; Joe and his father exchanged glances.

"There you are, Mother Fisher!" said Aubrey. "Any woman's fancy — what do you say? Even to the little old carnation!"

He rapped smartly on the table with his knuckles, walked to the kitchen door, and called:

"Come on, Amy! Step on the United Gas out there; customer in here waiting for the old aqua pura. Man's got to have something to drink — how about it, Pop?"

And he gave Mr. Fisher a hearty slap on the shoulder.

"You'll stay with me on that, won't you, Pop?" He let his laugh go again; Mr. Fisher, greatly annoyed, went on doggedly reading his paper.

"Yes, sir!" said Aubrey. "Man's got to have his little drink when he's thirsty — going to get it, too, law or no law! But I want to tell those of you who have ventured out this evening that this is a very pretty little picture of domestic felicity you have spread out before me!"

He laughed raucously, but no one paid the slightest attention to him.

"Father reading!" he went on. "Mother knitting." He ought to have been withered by her look, but he was proof against such weap-

ons. "Mother's always knitting, though. And little old Tommy Edison Fisher over there, working eighteen hours a day to make the rich man richer and the poor man poorer." He tapped Joe on the back lightly; then moved over and let his hand fall heavily on Mr. Fisher's shoulder. "What about it, Popcorn? Right or raving?"

"God damn it — let me alone!" cried Mr. Fisher, starting to his feet violently. "And keep your hands to yourself!"

He crossed to the hall door, muttering angrily.

"I never saw such a damn pest in my life!" he said, as he went upstairs.

Aubrey was unmoved, except to laughter even more violent than his wont.

"Sign on the dotted line!" he said. "And little old Popsy-Wopsy getting sore and leaving us all flat! Nevertheless and notwithstanding, Mrs. Fisher, I'd like to mention — just so you can file it away for future reference — that the kid from West Philadelphia is giving the growing boy the said and done!"

Joe grinned and went on about his work. And, as Amy came in, Aubrey turned to greet her with a deep bow.

"And here she is, herself and not a moving picture!"

"Here's your water, Aubrey — I'm afraid it's not very cold —" said Amy.

"Blushing as she gave it, looking down — at her feet so bare and her tattered gown! How's that, Mother Fisher?" He laughed uproariously as he saw the way Mrs. Fisher looked sharply at Amy's feet. "Just a figure of speech, Mother! Amy's as presentable as your daughter always would be. Can't beat that little old Willie Shakespeare, though, can you? No, sir — I'd like to tell the brothers that that little old Shakespeare party sure shook a wicked spear. Well, here's laughter, ladies! and, Mr. Marconi, sir, my best regards to you!"

"It isn't very cold, is it, Aubrey?" asked Amy.

"Delicious — !"

"Whyn't you let it run, Amy?" said Mrs. Fisher.

"I did, but it just keeps on running warm — it didn't seem to get any colder, Mom."

"Well, all I know is —"

"It was very nice," said Aubrey, settling the matter. "And a sweeter draught, from a fairer hand, was never quaffed!"

"Oh, you!" said Amy, taking the glass and going back to the kitchen.

"Thank you very much — no, no more, thanks," said Aubrey. "But, to be serious — yes, sir, Mr. Joseph Fisher, I want to tell you you're wasting your time. When you're all through — when you've burned quarts of midnight oil, when you've sacrificed your youth, your strength, what'll you have? Echo answers what — but hold, I'll tell you!

"They'll offer you twenty cents — and they'll take it and sell it for twenty million! Take it or leave it — that's their way. Sign on the dotted line! That's their battle cry of slavery. Yes, sir —that's exactly what they did to little old yours truly here — ! Twenty Lincoln Anacondas for a formula that would have solved the greatest problem before the Industrial Chemical World to-day!"

"What was that, Aubrey?" asked Joe, as he gathered his materials and got up.

"Why, just a formula I'd worked out. All it would do would be to prevent the rusting of iron and steel — that's all! Save I don't know how many millions a year. A simple solution of vanadium and manganese — but, mark this, Joe — to be added to the metal in its molten state

instead of applied externally, the way they've always done!"

"Is that so?" said Joe. He looked at Aubrey in an amused, speculative way. "And they turned you down, eh?"

"Wanted my idea for nothing — that's all! Oh, I didn't tell them the details—just what I was working on. And just because I was a workingman and not one of the inside ring — pouf, they wouldn't listen — gave me and it the swinging door!"

"'S tough," said Joe. "Say, Mom, d'you know anything about where that other little screwdriver got to — the one with the black handle?"

"They saw they couldn't buy me — or my brains, either one!" Aubrey declaimed.

"What screwdriver d'you mean, Joe — the one you fixed the sewing machine with?"

"Yeah — that little short one with the black handle — it's got just the width blade I need now —"

"Oh, I know the one — I think I saw it out on the shelf there over the sink. Don't you go to upsettin' everything out there, though,"

"It's no good, Joe." Aubrey, by no means discouraged because neither Joe nor his mother

were listening, talked on. "I found out! They'd rather go on paying a million dollars a year to paint iron and steel — buildings, bridges, fences, everything — than pay me a decent price for what I found out for them!"

"D'you find it, Joe?" Mrs. Fisher called.

"And do you know why they wouldn't pay me?" asked Aubrey, dramatically. "I'll tell you, Mother Fisher! Because I work for my living. That's the said and done on the whole business. Keep them poor and get them married — that's their policy. And then, as my darling old Mother used to say, 'You've got them on their beams and hinges.'"

"I don't see that anybody's tryin' to make anybody get married if they don't want to," said Mrs. Fisher, goaded into noticing him at last — as she always was, in the end, his endurance being greater than hers.

"But they do want to get married, Mother Fisher — that's the said and done. It's the capitalist stops them by not paying living wages."

"Well, I guess it'd be just as well if some of them was stopped. Drat that boy — he nor Amy can't ever find a thing for themselves —"

She went out to join in the hunt for the screwdriver.

"Don't go, Mother Fisher!" Aubrey called after her. "Don't you go back on little old William Jennings Bryan too! Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Sign on the dotted line!"

Amy, her eyes ablaze with anger at the way her family was treating Aubrey, stood behind him, flushed and defiant.

"Oh, come on, Aubrey — come on in here!" she said.

"All right! Coming! But that's the said and done, Amy — it's the poor man that gets it every time. Ask me where — I'll tell you, on the neck! I put a question up to Secretary Mellon in a letter I wrote him six weeks ago — absolutely stumped him. I know, because I haven't had a line from him yet. And all I asked him was how his tax revision plan would affect the great American railroad employee! You'd think he could answer a simple question!"

CHAPTER V

I

THIS is the story of the Fishers. Of Pop, angry still, lying down on his bed, driven by Aubrey Piper's loud mouth and too ready hand from the citadel of his evening's rest. Of Mom, knitting in the living room, straining her ears to gather snatches of the blatherskite's talk. Of Joe, calm, imperturbable in the serenity of his youth, building out of scraps of material a radio set that, when it was done, would pick up Havana as readily as Camden. Of Amy, with Aubrey safely back in the parlor at last, sitting on the sofa with him, looking at him, listening, wondering, her shy eyes full of her own deep thoughts. Of Clara and Frank Hyland, gone to the movies, and then home.

All those lives touched one another and came together, now and again. They were bound up with and in one another. For all of them a complete independence of thought and life had long since ceased to be possible. Joe, indeed, the youngest of them all, came nearer to achieving a real detachment than any of the others. But

none of them knew what Joe was doing or wanted to do. Had he told them, even, they would not have known.

Each of them did retain some secrets. There must have been moments when Neil Fisher's mind held thoughts that would have shocked his wife.

Yet, after all, it was Frank Hyland who succeeded most completely in covering and concealing his true life, his true thoughts, his true desires.

It would have occurred to Mrs. Fisher as readily to doubt her own conduct as to believe that Frank Hyland was concealing anything of importance from Clara. She would have laughed at the idea, had any one ventured to make so fantastic a suggestion, that Frank Hyland had not, perhaps, actually attended a business dinner at the Glenwood Club that night; that more than once, when business had called Frank away in the evening, or on a Sunday, he had been occupied in a wholly different fashion.

Just so would she have laughed had any one asked her if Frank Hyland were happy. Of course he was. He had a good wife, a good home — hadn't she herself trained Clara as a housekeeper, and a Clara who had always been a far

more docile and tractable girl than Amy? Frank had a good position and fine prospects; he had money in the bank and other money well and profitably invested. Of course he was happy. Had she been asked whether he had not, perhaps, a hidden emotional life of his own, she would have been both puzzled and angry.

Yet he had. Frank's story was simple enough; trite enough also some will say. He had been in love with another girl long before he had ever seen Clara. He had been young then, and with his way still to make. Older people could see the good stuff in Frank; the fine, strong roots of the man. They could foresee, too, the success he was bound to have. But the girl he loved was impatient. She had been more like Amy than like Clara; pleasure-loving, easily impressed by show and display; avid for excitement and good times. She had loved Frank — but she hadn't loved him enough. They had been engaged — but one day Frank had a note from her that told him she was married to another man and was off for the West.

Frank had taken the blow in a fashion wholly and admirably characteristic. He had suffered the more, probably, for his stern repression of every sign that he was hurt at all. He hadn't

sulked; he hadn't made gestures of despair. But he had withdrawn into himself, and he hadn't, for years, allowed himself to take any interest at all in women. No self-denial had been involved in that; he was never tempted to approach friendship with a woman again until he met Clara.

Clara, when at last he came to know her, did much to heal the wound that he had suffered. She could match his moods of silence. She loved him, and in the way of some women, fine and generous of spirit, scorned to conceal her love by any artifice or pretense of indifference. She soothed him, comforted him; at first, she attracted him, too, more than any woman but one had ever done. He was sure of himself when he asked her to marry him; happy, in his quiet way, when she agreed.

And their marriage, just at first, had promised to be completely and richly happy. Indeed, the chances are all that it would have been so to the end had not the other woman, soon afterward, reëntered his life. She had, to do her justice, no idea of doing so; the second, and, in a way, far more serious injury she did to Frank Hyland was due far more to chance than to any conscious design on her part.

Gertrude Dean, ten years after her marriage, was precisely what any understanding person would have known, from the beginning, that such a marriage would make of Gertrude Shaw, the girl who had jilted Frank Hyland. Her marriage had been a failure; happy enough for the first year or two, it had degenerated into an association maintained because to maintain it was simpler and more convenient than to end it. She saw little of her husband; she went her way, as he went his. She had plenty of money and complete freedom; she could go where she pleased, live as she liked.

Frank Hyland saw her, for the first time after her marriage, one day when he was in town on business. They met in Broad Street and stared at one another as if each had seen a ghost. She was, he thought, as pretty as ever; she didn't, indeed, look much older. And that one glimpse of her shattered Frank's new and hard-won peace of mind.

"Frank!" she said. "Frank Hyland!" She gave him both her hands. "After all these years! My dear — you look so old!"

"You don't," he said, with an effort. "You — haven't changed a bit."

"It's sweet of you to say so!" She sighed.

"But I have — I know I have! Life does things to you, Frank. Ah — if one only knew, before it was too late —"

"Aren't you happy?" Frank Hyland had, at times, the appalling directness of so many habitually silent men.

"Oh — happy!" she said. "Who do you know who's happy? I want to see you, Frank — have you had lunch?"

He had not. And he never hesitated about going back with her to her hotel. She was in Philadelphia just for a day or two, she said, to attend to some business; her father had died, a few weeks before, and she had had to come on about his will — not that he had had anything much to bequeath.

"I saw about that," Frank said. "I was sorry — I wondered where you were."

"You have thought of me sometimes, then, haven't you — even though I treated you so badly?" Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Frank — if you knew how I'd crucified myself — how bitterly sorry I've been, again and again —"

She believed most of the things she said to him that day, no doubt. The sight of him had carried her back to the cleanest and truest period

of her life; the time before disillusionment and experience had hardened her. In a way, perhaps, Frank Hyland had always been an ideal for her. Yet he couldn't know, from the way she spoke, that she hadn't, just at first, known him, when she had seen him again; that there had been long periods of time when she had never thought of him; that, in the years that had passed since he had seen her, she had passed from one flirtation to another. He took her at her word; what else could he do, being what he was?

He did not see her again during that stay of hers in Philadelphia. But the damage was done. He was appalled, horrified, repentant. To Clara he said nothing. He was not silenced by any conventional doubts or hesitations; he had certainly no thought, at that time, that he would ever see Gertrude again. He did not tell Clara simply because there was so much to tell, and so much that was bound to hurt and wound her.

Rather, in all honor and kindness, he tried to keep the thing that had happened wholly away from her — not to let it touch her in any way. Plenty of men have tried to do that and tried to do it, moreover, from motives far higher than

are ever ascribed to those who try, and fail, and are found out.

Whether Clara realized that something had happened, something that stood between them and dimmed the luster there had been, at first, upon their marriage, he did not know; he scarcely dared to ask himself, indeed. His own struggle with himself obsessed him; his own suffering was so keen that he could not, for a long time, give thought to her.

He did see Gertrude again, of course. She saw to it that he did. He saw her whenever she came to Philadelphia; sometimes when she was in New York. She always wrote to him and gave him warning of her coming. She wrote to him at his office. And she was clever; she never reproached him for his marriage, of which, of course, he told her; she never gave him the chance to be on the defensive about Clara.

Just what she wanted it would be hard to guess. She was a disappointed woman; older than Clara, she was obliged to give constant thought to her appearance, lest it betray her. What hope she had of some ultimate solution of the problem created by the accident of her meeting with Frank she probably didn't know herself. But it must have been comforting to her

to realize, as she very soon did, that she could still move him, that he still loved her.

There was, as a matter of fact, nothing about their intercourse that need have been concealed. They would meet and have lunch or dinner together in Philadelphia or New York. Sometimes they just saw one another for half an hour. Gertrude took it all, naturally, much less seriously than did Frank. She was living in Chicago; there is no reason to suppose that she had greatly altered her course of the last few years. And that meant that there was, probably, some man in Chicago with whom she was carrying on a clandestine and therefore exciting affair. She had come to need some such stimulus.

Her husband had ceased to care about her long ago; he too had interests outside his home. Of Gertrude he asked, seemingly, only discretion; so long as she avoided anything like open scandal he was satisfied. Indeed, he was probably more than satisfied, since her behavior licensed his. Of her meeting with Frank Hyland he probably never even heard.

It was Frank who was torn and troubled. He had never before, in all his life, done an underhand or shameful thing. He had never be-

trayed any one who had trusted him. Except for Clara, his course, in his own mind, would have been clear. He would have taken Gertrude at her word, and, believing that she still loved him, would have insisted that she go to her husband and demand her freedom. But it seemed to him impossible that he should abandon Clara, or indeed do anything that might hurt her.

He had not been near the Glenwood Club that night that he went back to the Fishers' to meet Clara. He had had dinner with Gertrude down town, and had, later, seen her on board her train for the West. And she had, as she said good-by, impulsively thrown her arms about him and kissed him. It was that memory he had carried with him to Mrs. Fisher's living room; that had confused his mind as he tried to concentrate upon the problem of Amy and Aubrey Piper.

II

There was, naturally enough, a side of Aubrey Piper that, as yet, Amy alone had seen. When she drew him back into the parlor, inwardly raging at the slights her mother and the others had put upon him, Amy sighed. He was so triumphantly unaware of what they

really thought of him! He laughed at Pop's anger. Well, Pop had a lot to do, it seemed to Amy, getting mad that way just because Aubrey had high spirits! And he was right about Joe. Joe *was* wasting his time. Aubrey knew.

"I like that brother of yours, Amy," Aubrey said, standing up and looking down at her. It seemed to Amy that he was the finest figure of a man she had ever seen. His very clothes had an important look. She liked the care he took of himself; the way his shoes were always polished, and his immaculate linen. So many men were careless about such things. And their finger nails! Aubrey's, though, were always perfect.

"Joe's all right, at that," said Amy.

"That's the said and done! And I don't mind telling you, Amy, that I'm going to be able to use Joe, a little later, when my plans begin to develop. He's bright and he's dependable. He's just the sort of boy I've been looking for."

"You don't mean — not down in the railroad, Aubrey — ?"

He roared.

"You don't think I'm planning to stay with the Pennsylvania Railroad all my life, do you, Amy? That's temporary. I'm just there while

I get things organized for myself. No, sir, Amy, there's nothing in this business of working for somebody else — especially a big corporation. I'm going to be my own employer. If I'm worth something to the Pennsylvania Railroad I'm worth more to myself. I can pay myself bigger wages than any one else can afford to, and don't you forget it!"

"But you have to have capital to start a business of your own, don't you, Aubrey?" asked Amy.

"Sign on the dotted line! You've got the idea, exactly! Capital — that's the word. Lots of it. That's why I'm waiting — until I can get things lined up right. But when the time comes — you watch the kid from West Philly! Watch him if you can — he'll be going too fast for most people to see him."

"What business are you going into, Aubrey?"

He had to strike an attitude to answer her; feet well apart, thumbs in his armholes.

"Well, now, Amy, I'll tell you — I don't know yet. Not for certain. It may be one thing — and it may be another. Depends on how things look. In this modern world you have to watch your chance and strike while the iron's hot. You have to be an opportunist. Sometimes I like the

automobile business — sometimes it seems to me they're riding for a fall — overproduction, you know. But, take an agency for a good, snappy car, and the right man can make money. Transportation — that's a great staple in this country, Amy. The demand keeps up, pretty well, year in and year out."

"It'd be nice to have a car," said Amy. That was the way her mind worked. Aubrey was condescending.

"Well, I'll tell you about that, too. Many's the time I've thought of buying a car — but then I said I'd wait. I want to get just what I want when I do get it. I'm glad you brought that up. What's your idea? What appeals to you most? Smart roadster — coupé — sedan?"

"Me? Oh, Aubrey — I never thought —"

"Well, sir, Amy, it's time you began to think! The kid from West Philly's not going to do much without getting the said and done from you."

He sat down beside her abruptly. Amy closed her eyes. She felt as if she were being carried away, as if she were floating on a cloud. She was vaguely conscious that he had taken her hand. And then she was startled by the sound of a new note in his voice. It was almost hoarse;

eagerness was in it and something like humility, although that she did not recognize.

"Amy — honey — look at me a minute. See — ?"

She glanced up, and then down at her hand. Something was shining; a ring. He was reaching it down toward her finger.

"Amy — I've been around a lot — I've known lots of girls — but you're the only one I ever really wanted — like this. What do you say, Amy?"

"Oh, Aubrey —"

She couldn't say anything more. But the next moment he kissed her, and, eyes shut again, she surrendered to the bliss of that instant, and he had his answer. He leaped up.

"Sign on the dotted line!" he cried exultingly. "Watch the kid from West Philly now! There'll be no holding him! Come on — let's tell the folks — !"

"No — no — wait — I want to tell them myself, Aubrey —"

She was up and clinging to him, sheer panic in her voice. He laughed as he held her.

"All right, Amy. Just as you say. Anything to please the ladies!"

"Let's keep it to ourselves, just for a little while," she pleaded. "Mom —"

"She won't mind!" he said. "Just you leave her to me, Amy. We'll make things hum around here, I tell you! Just wait — we'll fix things up for them. Your mother's worked hard all her life — time she had things a little easy!"

"You're wonderful, Aubrey!" Amy breathed. "I don't know what I've ever done to deserve to be so lucky —"

"And there's Pop, too. Time he took a rest — quit work and eased up," Aubrey went on. "Plenty for him to do around the place, but he needn't keep punching the time clock every morning the way he's been doing. He's not so young any more."

"You'll never get Pop to quit work," Amy said, wide-eyed. "But you're so good, Aubrey! When I think —"

She stopped, fearful of hurting him. But he was off in realms of thought of his own.

"Young Joe ought to quit work too, and get a good technical education," he said. "There's a boy with a future, if he can just get the training. Good mind — mechanical genius, in his own way."

"Joe's handy, sure enough. You'd never be-

lieve all the things he does around the house."

"And you — !" Aubrey came back to Amy. And that, after all, was what she wanted then.

III

Upstairs Mr. Fisher had dropped off to sleep. In the living room Mrs. Fisher had dozed off in her chair, her knitting fallen in her lap. Joe was wide awake, busy with his radio. He was deeply content. Aubrey's laughter, the subdued sound of voices from the parlor, didn't disturb him. Even the sound of the piano, when, very late, Amy started suddenly to play while Aubrey sang, didn't affect his interest in what he was doing. Joe had the faculty of utter concentration upon the task in hand. But Mrs. Fisher started as the music began and awoke, without quite knowing at first what had awakened her nor how long she had been asleep.

"What's that? Did you say something, Joe?" she asked.

"Not a thing, Mom," said Joe, smiling.

"Huh! I must ha' been dozin', then. Thought I heard you, just as plain —"

"You've been dead to the world for the last hour."

"Hour? Sakes alive — what time is it?"

"Quarter to twelve."

"Is that him still in there? Singin', at this time o' night? What'll the neighbors think? And your Pop — is he upstairs?"

"Guess so," said Joe. "Sure — the old Scientific American himself — still at it. They just started singin' though, Mom. Guess that's what woke you up."

"My God, he's got no business singin' at this time of the night! I swear —"

"Talent should never be suppressed at any time, Mom. Ask him, if you don't believe me."

"It's a wonder Amy wouldn't have sense enough to stop him," said Mrs. Fisher.

"Oh, well —"

"I never saw a man yet that didn't think he could sing — and the half of them with voices like an old bullfrog! Put that thing away, Joe — you've been at it long enough. And see that the back's locked up, will you? I guess Amy hasn't an idea of the time or she'd shut him up."

"Let the young man express himself, Mom."

But he got up obediently and moved toward the kitchen.

"Oh, I wouldn't care if he bawled his head off, so far as I'm concerned," said Mrs. Fisher.

"I'd be glad if he did. But I don't want him to be wakin' your father up. And that's what he'll be doin', the first thing you know, and then the fat'll be in the fire for sure. Just listen at him, will you!"

Aubrey reached a high note just then, and Joe and his mother looked at each other until Joe laughed at her consternation.

"Ain't that terrible, Joe? Don't you think I ought to tell Amy what time it's gettin' to be?"

"No. Give the growing boy a chance, Mom! There —"

Aubrey reached and held the final note.

"Hurray!" cried Joe. "Give him a hand, Mom! There's no one applauding him but himself now!"

"Shush, will you, Joe! You're as bad as he is!"

"Sign on the dotted line, Mom!"

"Don't you go encouragin' him, for God's sake! He's bad enough without that!"

Joe went out into the kitchen, laughing. And from the head of the stairs came Mr. Fisher's voice, high-pitched and querulous.

"Josie!" he shouted. "Hey, Josie!"

"Yes, Neil?"

"What the devil's going on down there? Don't any of you know what time it is?"

"It's all right — Joe was just cuttin' up a minute ago," said Mrs. Fisher.

"What's Amy playin' the piano for, this time o' night?"

"Why, her and Joe was just foolin'—"

"Damn funny kind of fooling in the middle of the night! The neighbors'll be wonderin' what kind of a house we're keepin' here."

"Well, they've stopped it now, Neil."

"Well, you tell them to see that it's *kept* stopped! And get them lights out down there and come to bed. It's nearly twelve o'clock."

"All right — all right. I'm telling you it's all right. I'll be right up."

She turned away distractedly and stood looking at the parlor door. A wild burst of laughter from Aubrey startled her; roused her, too, to action. She went quickly to the door but, just as she was about to open it, it was pulled open violently from the other side, and Amy, her cheeks flushed, her eyes resentful, faced her.

"What's the matter now?" asked Amy.

"Why — er — I — I was just comin' to tell you to be sure to put them lights out. I'm just goin' up — it's nearly twelve o'clock —"

"Sign on the dotted line!" said Aubrey, appearing. "I, also, am just about to take my reluctant leave, Mother Fisher!"

"Well, I don't want to hurry you, but —"

"In fact, the recent outburst was in the nature of a farewell number! The little old song at twilight, you know, Mother Fisher — to soothe the savage breast."

"Oh, come on back, Aubrey!" said Amy angrily. She glared at her mother's warning gesture toward the stairs. And, defiantly, deliberately, she slammed the parlor door as she went back.

"The damn fool!" said Mrs. Fisher. "Joe!"

"Yeh?"

"You'd better bring Gypsy Queen in and put her in the laundry. She was shiverin' when I opened the door this mornin'. I think it's too cold for her on that back porch yet awhile."

"All right — I'll get her."

It took some minutes, first to get the poodle in, and then to convince her that she had to sleep in the laundry and not go poking her way into the living room to make her bed on the rug. And while Joe and his mother were busy, Aubrey and Amy came back into the living room.

"Good night, Mother Fisher," Aubrey called.

She froze at once and was perfectly still, motioning to Joe, too, to keep quiet.

"Mom!" called Amy quietly. Then: "I guess she's gone up, Aubrey — I don't hear any sound of any one."

"Right you are, Amy! 'On the right side she is sleepin'.' Ha-ha-ha!"

"Ha-ha!" echoed Joe mockingly.

"Shush — don't let him hear you, Joe," said Mrs. Fisher.

"Is he goin', d'you think?"

"Acts like he was. Don't let him hear you, though, or we'll have him here another hour!"

"Well, I'm goin' to bed," said Joe.

"Joe!"

"What?"

"What was that he was sayin' here to-night about discoverin' somethin' to keep steel and iron from rustin'?"

"Oh — that! Wasn't that a scream?"

"That's what *you're* always talkin' about doin', ain't it?" asked his mother.

"Yes. I was talkin' to *him* about it here one night, while he was waitin' for Amy to get dressed and come downstairs. And now he's forgotten where he heard about it."

"Can you imagine that!" exclaimed Mrs. Fisher.

"I was wondering whether you were getting it, when he was talkin' about it before."

"No. It never struck me till afterwards. But then I remembered how you was always sayin' something like that — not all that rot about how they wouldn't buy it —"

"It'll be bought, fast enough, when any one gets it right, no matter who he is that finds it," said Joe. "The whole industry's lookin' for the right formula that'll really work. Did you get what he was sayin' to-night, Mom?"

"Now, you know I never pay any attention to what *he* says, Joe! How'd I ever get anything done if I did?"

"He's a bird! Where are they, Mom? He gone yet?"

"No. They're saying good night out in the hall. Takes them long enough!"

"I guess it's safe enough. The vestibule door's shut. He won't see me."

"Good night. You'd better close that window at the head of your bed and not have it blowing in on you all night, Joe."

"All right, Mom. Good night."

"Good night." Left alone, she went about,

putting things to rights. The front door closed; she turned as Amy came in, failing utterly to see how tense the girl was, and how her anger had drawn her eyes together. "Did you put out that light in the parlor, Amy?"

"That was a nice trick you people played tonight!" said Amy, furiously.

"What? What trick?"

"Everybody walking out of the room that way, right while Aubrey was talking!"

"What did you want us to do? Sit here all night and be listenin' to him gabbing?"

"You wouldn't have had to sit here all night listening to him! He was only in here five minutes."

"That's no thanks to him. He'd have been here till morning if somebody didn't do something."

"Well, I was never so mortified in my life!" said Amy.

"Oh, don't be wasting your sympathy on him, Amy! He don't have to have anybody listening to him. He'd talk to the four walls if there wasn't anybody else around to hear him."

"Oh, is that so! You haven't got a good word for him, any one of you! And he — you just

wait — that's all! What did Pop get into such a temper about?"

"Because he hit him on the back — that's what! And enough, too!"

"Well, that was a lot to get mad about, I must say!" Amy declared.

"Well, he's always hittin' somebody — on the back or the shoulder or some place," said Mrs. Fisher. "And your father *said* the next time he did it he'd walk out of the room — you heard him say so yourself. I never saw such a man! He can't say two words together without hittin' somebody! I declare, if I was Joe I'd hit him back once!"

"Joe'd better not! Why, Aubrey could make two of him! I'll bet you all won't get a chance to insult him again, Mom, I'll tell you that."

"Well, let him stop his silly talk and his everlastin' hittin' people on the back and he won't be gettin' insulted every minute. Sign on the dotted line — and talkin' about Shakespeare that way! What kind of talk is that for a sensible man as old as he is! It's no wonder our Joe says he's a nut."

"Oh, every one's a nut to the people around here — if they're a little bit different." Amy was scornful.

"It isn't only the people round here. Everybody that knows him says it. And you needn't laugh that way, either, miss — it's true, like I'm telling you."

"Who do *you* know that knows him?" asked Amy sharply.

"I know Frank Hyland, for one."

"Frank — You mean Clara's husband?"

"Yes, I mean Clara's husband."

"Oh, don't go making up a lie, Mom. Frank Hyland never even *saw* Aubrey."

"Oh, is that so? He didn't, didn't he?"

"No, he didn't!"

"Well, now, my lady, you're so smart — but Frank Hyland knows him better than you do," said her mother, triumphantly.

"I don't believe it!" said Amy.

"Doesn't matter whether you believe it or don't believe it. He knows him just the same. He's been lookin' at him for years, down at that restaurant on Fifteenth and Arch where he eats his lunch. And Frank Hyland says he's as crazy as a bass singer!"

"I suppose that's what Clara was here to tell you, wasn't it?"

"What's it matter *who* was here to tell it, Amy, if it's true?"

"Well, I'll tell you what it matters, Mom! You listen — I want to tell you something right now. You tell our Clara from me to mind her own damn business as far as Aubrey Piper is concerned — and me, too!"

"Oh, don't go flyin' off into a temper if anybody speaks to you."

"Well, don't speak to me about things that *put* me in a temper, then!" said Amy, half crying.

"You're not frightenin' any one around here with your tempers, Amy, I can tell you that."

"No, and nobody around here is frightening me, either. Our Clara took who she wanted and if I want Aubrey Piper I'll take him, no matter what any one says about him!"

"Well, take him then — and the sooner the better! It's a pity to be spoiling two houses with the pair of you! Only remember this, Amy — if you do take him, be sure you keep him — and that he — keeps — you. And don't be comin' around here cryin' for your Pop to keep you!"

"Don't make me laugh, Mom!"

"You can laugh all you like, Amy. There's a lot of that kind of laughing goin' on these days. But they change their tune when the rent begins

to come due and there's a baby to be looked out for, maybe, and it's the mothers and fathers that has to listen to the changed tune then. But nothin'll do but they must get married."

"You got married, didn't you?" Amy asked, sarcastically.

"Yes, I did. To a man that was able to keep me."

"How do you know Aubrey Piper wouldn't be able to keep his wife?"

"Because I know what he earns — and it isn't enough."

"There you go — making up things again, Mom! You don't know anything about what he earns."

"I do so know, too. He earns a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and not a penny more. And I know because Frank Hyland says that's what he gets, down there at the Pennsylvania Railroad he's always talking so big about."

"What does Frank Hyland know about it?"

"He knows, all right — and you will too, before you're done! Doesn't his business take him in there all the time?"

"What does Frank say he does — since he's told you so much?"

"Why, he says he's a clerk, of course, like a

hundred others down there," said Mrs. Fisher.

"That shows how much he knows about it!"

"I suppose this Piper told you he *owned* the Pennsylvania Railroad!" Mrs. Fisher suggested.

"Well, if he had, I'd take his word before I would Frank Hyland's!"

"Why should you take his word before you'd take Frank Hyland's?" her mother asked "Just tell me one reason."

"Well, you tell me one why I shouldn't."

"Because he's a fool of a blatherskite —"

"You mean that's your opinion of him, Mom."

"It's the opinion of everybody that ever had to sit and listen to him. But you'd believe *him* before you'd take the word of a steady, sensible man that's got a future before him."

"I don't know anything about Frank Hyland, Mom," said Amy.

"You know he's been your brother-in-law for five years, don't you? What do you know about this other clown?"

"Well, what do you *want* to know about him?"

"*I* don't want to know anything about him! I know more than I want to know about him now. But before I'd get the name of having a

fellow come to see me steady, there's a few things I'd want to know about him, I'll tell you that."

"I've told you where he lives and where he works; what more do you want me to know about him?"

"There's no use talking to you, Amy. I can see that."

"No, and there's no use talking to you, either, Mom. You're so prejudiced against Aubrey —"

"Oh, hush, Amy. This fellow's got you so crazy mad about him that I believe you'd take him if you knew he had a wife and family somewhere and not two cents in his pocket to keep the lot of you with!"

"Well, I guess we'd get along some way, even if I did," said Amy, defiantly.

"All right. Try it."

"Everybody else does."

"Oh, I've no patience with you, Amy! I don't know what's come over you. That's the sort of talk leaves them livin' in garrets. And back at their jobs ten days after the wedding."

"Oh, you talk as if everybody that was married was starvin' to death, Mom. And they're not. I know lots of folks that get along fine —"

"You listen to me, Amy, before it's too late

for listenin' to do you any good. There's ways of starvin' to death beside not gettin' enough to eat. What do you know about money and managin', I'd like to know? Oh, that's the funny part of it, though — you're like lots of others. You're mighty shrewd and knowin' about money while you're at home, so far as what you give your father and mother is concerned. But the minute some clown with a flower in his buttonhole and patent leather shoes on his feet winks at you, you forget there's such a thing in the world as a leg of lamb or a ton of coal that has to be paid for! And then it's just as Clara says — it's *your* people that has to come to the rescue."

"Oh, Clara!" said Amy, angrily. "A lot she's got to do to come here talking that way about me and my affairs! I wish I'd been here while she was talking! I bet I'd have told her a thing or two to take home with her!"

"Oh, you needn't try to turn it on to Clara. She wasn't talkin' at all, hardly."

"She *must* have been talking! How else would you know all you've been saying?"

"She simply asked me where you were, and I told her you were getting dressed, on account this fellow was coming here again to-night. And

then it just come out that Frank Hyland knew him — she wasn't thinking to say anything about that, at first. But then I asked her, and she told me where he worked and what he did, and what he was paid, and all about him."

"Oh, is that so? Well, I'll tell you, Mom, what you've done — you've got me so I'd take him now, just for spite, if nothing else!"

"Well, let me tell *you* something, Amy — the day a girl that's used to spending money the way you are marries a thirty-five dollar a week man for any reason at all, the only one she's spitin' is herself."

"I guess I can take care of my own affairs!" said Amy.

"Maybe you can — maybe you can't. But there'll be no more permanent waves after that — you can make your mind up to that. Nor fifty-five dollar beaded dresses, neither — nor seven pairs of shoes in your closet."

"Well, I'd never come to anybody around here if I *did* ever need anything, I'll tell you that."

"Maybe you wouldn't."

"I won't — you needn't worry, Mom!"

"Time'll tell about that, Lady Jane. I've heard the like of you before, often enough. Put

out that light in the parlor, now, and come on upstairs to bed. It's after twelve o'clock."

Mrs. Fisher turned and went up the stairs. Halfway up she stopped.

"Good night, Amy," she said.

"Good night, Mom," said Amy absently. Already she had half forgotten what had happened. She was fumbling in the front of her dress. And now, alone at last, she brought out the cheap engagement ring, with its tiny chip diamond, that Aubrey had given her, and raised it to her lips to kiss it. That was her answer — to her mother, to Frank Hyland and Clara, to every one and everything.

CHAPTER VI

I

THERE was never any formal announcement of Amy's engagement to Aubrey Piper. No ceremonious interludes followed that night in the parlor when he gave Amy her ring and told her all he meant to do for her family. There was no interchange of courtesies between the families. Aubrey had no family, so far as Amy knew. He lived in a rooming house in West Philadelphia; it was cheap out there, and he had no carfare to worry about, since he had a pass that carried him into Broad Street every morning.

Mrs. Fisher pinned Amy down, a few days after their quarrel, and Amy admitted the truth defiantly, and thereafter wore her ring openly on her finger, instead of at the end of a ribbon. Joe noticed the new jewel and grinned. He was fond of Amy, in his undemonstrative way.

"Hooked, are you, Amy?" he said. "Well — don't let him talk you to death."

"I think you're horrid —" she began.

"Oh, he's all right. I like Aubrey, all right, at that," said Joe. "You'll find lots worse than him."

Even for that qualified approval Amy was profoundly grateful. Frank Hyland was quiet; Clara, nervous and afraid to say much, certainly wasn't encouraging. Pop was the last to hear the news. But he took it with surprising calm. Mrs. Fisher had looked for an outburst; none came.

"Amy's goin' to marry that blatherskite," she said one evening, when Aubrey had taken Amy to the movies.

"Who? Windy? I s'pose. Well, let him keep his hands off me and give his tongue a rest once in a while, when he's around here and I'll not ask any more of him."

"Is that all you care?" said his wife.

"What would I be carin' for? She's not asked me for what I think, has she?"

"No, and she'd not listen if you told her without waitin' to be asked."

"Well, then. Let be, Josie — there's nothin' we can do. He'll be good to her, like enough — he's not got the brains to be anything else."

"But what worries me is can he take care of her?"

Mr. Fisher let his paper fall.

"If she can live on a hundred and fifty a month, he can," he said. "If she can't she'll just have to go on working, like many another woman."

"He says he won't have his wife workin' after they're married."

"Then let him make enough to be keeping her himself. I tell you they've kept it from bein' any of our concern, Josie. Let them fend for themselves and see how they do. You can't tell that sort anything."

"I declare I don't know what's come over our Amy!" said Mrs. Fisher.

"It's come over lots of them before her, and I guess it'll come over lots more before the world ends. What's on the radio?"

"Just sportin' reports now — football and the like. I'm waitin' to tune in on KDKY — there's a talk about fashions for Florida on there tonight —"

"Works good, don't it? Joe says there's to be a speech we ought to get in New York tonight — big dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria that's going to be broadcasted."

"Yes. We can put the loud speaker on for that. It works good since he got that new rheo-

stat and put on another stage of amplification —"

Mr. Fisher was chuckling silently.

"What are you laughin' at?"

"Just thinkin'. Wasn't so long since you were nagging at Joe all the time to quit fussin' with that radio and sayin' you'd like to see yourself spendin' your time listenin' to Grand Opera!"

"Well, I guess I'm not too old to appreciate somethin' just because it's new."

"That's right, Mom." Joe had come upstairs; he stood a moment, looking proudly at the radio. "You know I sat up last night, after you folks had gone up? I got Hawaii — just as clear as if it was right here in town!"

"No! And the Bronsons ain't never got Chicago, even — and they got a neutrodyne set that cost them I don't know how much!"

"Their set's all right — you've got to know how to use any set to make it work right," said Joe. "Where's Aubrey and Amy?"

"Down to the movies — there was a picture Amy wanted to see."

"All she has to do is say what she wants!" said Joe. "He certainly does all he can to show her a good time!"

"I was tellin' your father they was goin' to get married."

Joe glanced at his father, and they exchanged looks of complete understanding.

"She might do a lot worse, at that," said Joe. "Aubrey's not a bad skate, at that. You don't hear about him hittin' this hootch they sell you since Prohibition, or runnin' around with wild women. And that's more'n you can say for some of these drug-store cowboys and finale hoppers Amy's given the gate to."

"Well, I hope they'll make out all right," said Mrs. Fisher.

II

Amy and Aubrey were married, finally, in a breathless rush, that gave no time for preparations or for elaborate ceremonies of any sort — even had these been in contemplation. The reason was simple; Aubrey could get a week's vacation and a pass for a trip at one time and not at another. Such considerations affect the plans, for weddings and other things, of most people in the world, although it isn't traditional, by any means, to say so.

So far as Amy was concerned, she didn't care. She wanted to be married; her only reaction to

Aubrey's suggestion of an earlier date than the one they had tentatively fixed was one of sheer delight just because it was earlier. And Mrs. Fisher, by that time, felt only relief at the prospect of being rid of Aubrey for a time.

The wedding was as simple as possible. The Reverend Schmidt came in to marry them; the ceremony took place in the parlor. The Hylands were there; Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, of course, and Joe. No friends at all were asked; if you had one you had to have all, and Mrs. Fisher put her foot down flat on the idea of a big wedding, which Aubrey, at least, would have liked. But, as Mrs. Fisher said, they were married just as hard and fast as if they'd had a church wedding and all the flowers in town and half-a-dozen bridesmaids, so what of it?

Amy came back, radiant with happiness, after their honeymoon of a week. They had gone to Niagara Falls — by way of Harrisburg and York, since Aubrey could get passes over the Pennsylvania system — after some debate as to whether they wanted to go there or to Atlantic City and Washington. It wouldn't have mattered to Amy; it was Aubrey, really, who made the decision.

There was, and it was not only in Amy's

imagining that that was so, a splendor, a sort of radiance about that week she spent with Aubrey. Let Mother Fisher say what she pleased; let Joe laugh; let Frank and Clara shake their wise heads; let Pop Fisher complain of Aubrey's back-slapping and loud talk — still he was in love with Amy and she with him. And if he talked a good deal, still he had his pride.

No bride of that season, setting off with her husband in a new car, or sailing on some great liner for Europe, was happier on her honeymoon than Amy. None had more tenderness, more true devotion, lavished upon her. There was reason for her eyes to shine, for her lips to be trembling with happiness as she looked at the man she had married.

Perhaps his clothes, extreme in cut though they were, were made from poor material. Perhaps they would wear shiny and need patching long before they should. He had his flower in his buttonhole always. He was never careless about anything that had to do with his appearance. He always remembered to raise his hat when he met Amy, or any other woman; he always leaped up, if he were sitting down, when she came into a room. Small things, these? Trifles, by way of comparison with the solid sub-

stance of Frank Hyland's prosperity? Perhaps. But you could never have convinced Amy of that.

Even North Philadelphia, when they came home, retained, for Amy, some of the glamor of the honeymoon. Aubrey had found two rooms, at an amazingly low rent, where they could be comfortable, as he put it, while they were looking around and he was getting his affairs in order. She learned, for the first time, just what his income was.

"Thirty-two dollars and fifty cents a week — don't forget the fifty cents!" he said. "That's what the Pennsylvania Railroad, one of the greatest railroads in the world, pays me! And they wonder why they can't keep good men — why men prefer to set up for themselves! Oh, they've lots of excuses — freight rates are low, and costs are rising. It's the white-collared man that pays — till he gets tired and quits!"

"And you with all those men under you!"

He waved off the responsibilities of management with a fine gesture.

"I've got something out of all that," he said. "After all, it's an asset, when you have your own business, to know how to handle men. And after taking charge of eighty clerks in an office

there's mighty little I don't know about that, I can tell you!"

"How long do you think you'll stay there though, Aubrey?" Amy asked.

"Well now, sir, Amy, that's hard to tell! I owe them something — because I owe it to myself. It doesn't do a man any good with the big fellows down on Broad Street to get the reputation of leaving any employer, even a bad one, in a hole. I wouldn't want to get out until I had a good man well broken in to do my work. And they're hard to find, these days. You'd be surprised to see how few of them down there have any initiative. They come to you with questions about the simplest thing you give them to do."

"And then, of course, you want to be sure of what you're going to do yourself —"

"That's the least of my worries! When the kid from West Philly gets ready to go they'll have a hard time seeing his dust, I'll tell you that much, Amy! It's just a question of deciding which is the best line to take."

Call Amy a fool, if you please, for believing him; for taking him seriously. Her mother did; others, who had nothing to say, thought as much. But what they never allowed for was the over-

powering effect of Aubrey's supreme belief in himself. He didn't lie, as ordinary boasters do; he was profoundly and sincerely convinced, at the moment, of the truth of all his statements. He had one of those minds, by no means rare, that leap over all the preliminaries of success and achievement; that see no interval of labor between conception and realization of an idea.

Aubrey saw himself always as arrived, successful. He never yet had had a vision of himself plugging, grinding away, working to attain an end. One problem, truly enough, he envisaged clearly; the start had to be auspicious. And he was waiting for a favorable opportunity. In his creed opportunity came and thrust itself upon one; it was not a thing to be sought out and created. Rich men, successful men, were those who, beneficiaries of some rare chance, had had the enterprise and the courage to grasp it. He was like that, he knew. If some one should offer him, now, stock in some such enterprise as the telephone of Bell's early days, he would know enough to take it. He wouldn't be like those who had scoffed and now spent their time computing what their profits would have been had they invested a hundred dollars in the original telephone securities. Not he!

Amy saw eye to eye with him. She pitied her father, working all his life for others. In Aubrey's sight, that was the supreme folly. She pitied Joe, working away, night after night, at inventions for which, Aubrey insisted, he would get nothing, even if he perfected them. She was sorry for Clara, linked to the plodding and unromantic Frank Hyland, who knew exactly what he would do all the rest of his life. Before her loomed adventure.

Yet, gradually, as week followed week, she began to wish for the fulfillment of some of her hopes. It wasn't easy to get along on thirty-two dollars and fifty cents a week. She had made twenty-five a week herself, toward the end, and it had gone farther than Aubrey's salary ever did, since her expenses at home had been low and she had had most of her money for herself — all of it, for that matter, whenever she really needed a new dress or a hat or a pair of shoes, and hadn't been able to make up her board.

She worried a little as the summer days shortened and a warning chill in the evening air reminded her that soon she must have fall clothes. Her summer wardrobe had lasted well — but she'd have to have new things soon. And she

could see for herself how hard it was going to be to manage. There was trouble about the rent already. Small as it was, it wasn't always ready when the time came. Aubrey, though, had a lordly way of disposing of such matters.

"By Jove!" he would say, when she told him reluctantly of some dunning visit that had been paid during the day. "I won't have that sort of thing! Just you leave that to me, Amy. I'll stop in to-morrow and give them a piece of my mind!"

Seemingly he did, too. And when bills became too pressing he had some mysterious way of settling them. He would go off in the morning, thoughtful and frowning, and call her up, about six o'clock, as cheerful as a cricket, and tell her to come on downtown and meet him for dinner.

"Made a little turn to-day!" he'd tell her triumphantly. "All square with the world again — rent paid — bills all out of the way! Time for a celebration."

She loved those dinners downtown, and the visit to a vaudeville or a movie that always rounded off the evening. That was life — life as she had dreamed of living it. And Aubrey was always full of plans for the future. Europe —

Florida — California — they'd go everywhere and see everything before they were through!

III

Upon Clara Hyland, as upon Amy, although in a manner wholly different, life was forcing itself impressively about this time. Clara reckoned the time of her marriage in years, rather than in months. And she had only the past, and not a future, to regard.

It was Clara's way, as it was, essentially, her mother's, to take life as it came; to expect, to ask, little of it. Yet to maintain that attitude was a far easier thing for a woman of Mrs. Fisher's generation than for one of Clara's. It was not so just because Clara was young; it was something with which age had little to do. Clara's whole environment, her friendships, the plays and pictures that she saw, the books and magazines she read, taught her to look for far more from life and from marriage than it was the way of her mother's generation to expect.

There was in Clara as great a capacity for romantic love, for passion, as there was in Amy. Love had never been, for her, the abstract thing it had always been for her mother, as she could

now see. Her mother's generation had taken love for granted. Clara, few as were her demands, did not. She was far more sensitive to Frank Hyland's moods than he suspected.

She had sensed, very vaguely and uncertainly, a difference between the way Frank had made love to her while he was, in the phrase of her upbringing, "going with her", and the wooing she had dreamed of. But he had made her love him, even so. A wistful quality he had shown had appealed to all that was maternal in her; later there had been roused in her, and never satisfied, a wholly different desire from the one that had been enough to make her marry him.

She knew, almost to the day, of his meeting with Gertrude — although she had never heard of Gertrude. She did know, by sheer instinct, though, that something of the sort had happened; she came, in her constant speculation, very close indeed to the truth. It never occurred to her to suspect Frank of anything like infidelity; she knew him far too well to imagine him to be capable of anything of the sort.

But he was equally incapable of pretense — of affecting a feeling he no longer had. And Clara knew very well what those long silences of his meant; those fits of a dreamy abstraction. It

was hard for her to be patient with him when he was like that; hard to refrain from the shrewish reproaches in which her mother, at her age, would almost certainly have indulged. But she made the effort, and found a sort of reward in his inarticulate gratitude.

Yet Clara saw life slipping away from her; saw the years passing, while there was denied to her every real expression of herself. Frank grew more and more set in his silence; evening after evening saw them sitting alone, reading, scarcely exchanging a dozen words. They had few friends. Frank lacked a social instinct altogether; Clara was without the skill that might have atoned for her husband's deficiencies and brought him, despite himself, out of his brooding.

Close as she came to the truth about the explanation of her husband's almost complete absorption in his own thoughts, Clara was profoundly mistaken upon one point. She neither knew nor suspected anything of the queer and abortive renewal of his intimacy with Gertrude. It did not occur to her that she really did have, in a sense, a rival whom she might have fought upon something like equal terms. She visualized a Gertrude accurately enough, but not a Ger-

trude in the flesh. She thought it was a memory that stood between Frank and herself.

In a way, of course, that was true enough. It was not the Gertrude he saw once, perhaps, in six weeks or two months, whom Frank still lived; it was the Gertrude who had jilted him, the Gertrude he had held in his arms when she was a girl. They had never been really alone since they had met again; there had never been an opportunity for revealing, intimate talk. Frank knew no more of the Gertrude of their maturity than she chose to let him see and know, and she was clever enough to know that it behooved her to keep before him the image of her younger self.

Amy's marriage, her obvious happiness, her utter certainty of Aubrey's love, worked upon Clara in the most mysterious and profound way. It was not precisely envy of her sister that she felt; it was rather that Amy stimulated her, roused her, made her feel the necessity of making an effort, at least, before it should be hopelessly too late, to gain from life something of what she felt, blindly and dumbly enough, that it owed her. She could not envy Amy the love of a man she despised, as she did Aubrey, and yet. . . .

Clara's mind was a deeply and sincerely honest one. When she was brought face to face with a problem she never evaded it. And as it was borne in upon her that Amy's happiness was serving to accentuate her own drab loneliness she forced herself to examine her own position with a completeness and a frankness that threatened, after a time, to have devastating results. What was her relation to her husband?

Her mother could never have asked herself such a question. Every one, in Mrs. Fisher's time, knew exactly what marriage was. Some marriages, perhaps, were better and happier than others, but they were fundamentally much alike. Love, as Mrs. Fisher knew the word, was something that couldn't be expected to survive the first year or so and the time when the children began coming. After that one settled down and kept one's house and attended to one's work and was too busy to give thought to trifles.

But Clara's housekeeping occupied only a fraction of her time. She did her work easily and well, but she did less, in many ways, than her mother. Her home was more modern and complete. She had electricity and a score of conveniences her parents had never been able to afford. She had from the first, at Frank's

quiet insistence, a woman who came in to do the washing, and another for heavy cleaning. Later, again at his insistence, she had a maid.

Clara was, she felt, little more than a housekeeper — and was, as such, greatly overpaid. It would have made no difference to Frank, she fully believed, had she died or gone away from him. No essential change would have taken place in his life had she done anything so wildly impossible as leaving him; that thought, to be sure, never occurred to her, relatively emancipated though she was. Slowly, with infinite trouble, Clara was making up her mind to demand a settlement with Frank; a valuation of their life together; an open discussion of their relation to one another.

For her thinking, her tortured wondering, brought her, in the end, closer and closer to the point of admitting to herself that Amy had been wiser than she; that she would rather be loved, as Amy was loved, even by an Aubrey Piper, than ignored by a Frank Hyland.

IV

Only Joe, of all the Fishers, was at this time completely satisfied. He alone of the family was

never troubled or disturbed by Aubrey. He rather liked Amy's husband; he found him an unfailing source of amusement.

But Joe alone, of all the Fishers, had true resources of his own. He had that detachment which research, as well as art, gives to its votaries. Joe thought, at times, in a practical way; he wanted, naturally enough, to make money. But he was young enough to feel that he had plenty of time for that; his principal absorption was in the actual work he was doing far more than in the results that work might ultimately have and the effect success, if it finally came, might have upon his life.

Soon after Amy's marriage Joe had given up his job and gone to work, for less money, in a shipyard. His mother had railed at him. Not only was the work less profitable than that which he had given up; it was much farther from his home, entailing a long trip night and morning. He had only smiled at her protests.

"I know what I'm doing, Mom," he insisted. "I'm not so far now from what I'm looking for — that formula I've been after for keeping iron and steel from rusting. And I can see things, at this job — I can try out some of my ideas."

"You and your formulas —"

"That's the way you used to talk about the radio," he said. "But I notice I had to put in a loud speaker because no one could ever get the head 'phones away from you!"

"Leave the boy alone, Josie," said Mr. Fisher. "He knows what he wants. Maybe, if I'd had his sense when I was his age —"

"Have it your own way!" said Mrs. Fisher. "But you'll be wantin' to be married some day, Joe — though how you ever expect to get to know a girl well enough to marry her I don't know! You're workin' half the night most of the time, when other young fellows is out enjoyin' themselves."

"Yes, and he'll be enjoyin' himself later while those same young fellows is working to keep out of the poorhouse!" said Mr. Fisher. "I tell you the boy's got the right of it, Josie. Let him be at things his own way."

"He'll take it, whether or no," said his mother, and sighed.

About that she was absolutely right. Joe never argued; scarcely ever raised his voice. But neither did he ever give in. Wholly malleable and acquiescent when trifles were concerned, he was a very mule for obstinacy when

anything that seemed to him important was involved.

The extent to which Joe had contrived a life of his own would have surprised his mother beyond measure had she been able even vaguely to realize it. It might have surprised others. Joe was already better trained in science than a good many young men who were graduates of technical schools. His knowledge was spotty and incomplete, certainly, but it was astonishingly practical and to the point. He had the ability to find out all he needed to know upon any given topic; his mind was the true and extremely rare mind of the born research man; the man who loves and pursues knowledge for its own sake.

He was infinitely patient; he was as tolerant as he was patient. And he was an absolute realist and as absolute an individualist. He accepted nothing that was told to him; the only knowledge he was prepared to recognize was that which he acquired for himself or was able to prove for himself. Authority, naturally, he recognized; he had the crack student's faculty of determining almost at a glance the authenticity of statement purporting to be authoritative.

An inventor Joe was not and never would be. His mind was essentially creative, but it was not creative as is that of such an inventor as Marconi or Tesla. He might very well have devised some tool, and received credit as an inventor for doing so, but the truth would have been that he had found himself in need of that tool to do a certain thing. Joe approached his work far more in the spirit that led to the German discoveries in industrial chemistry than in that which has produced the great and characteristic Anglo-Saxon triumphs in the industrial field; he was utterly incapable of such a flash of pure intuitive genius as came more than once to Morse and Graham Bell.

CHAPTER VII

I

THE radio set Joe had made had worked great changes in Mrs. Fisher's days; it had, for the first time in her married life, really altered the routine of her household work. She liked now to hurry with her duties in the late afternoon; she contrived as often as possible a dinner that would leave her free, after five o'clock, to sit in the living room, the head 'phones to her ears, listening. The radio never seemed quite the same to her when the loud speaker was in operation and every one in the room could hear; she vastly preferred to be the sole recipient of whatever was on the air.

And when, one winter afternoon, the slam of the front door broke in upon what she was hearing, she frowned. It was too early for any one to be coming in; she had counted on at least another half hour of peace.

It was Aubrey who entered the room. He looked as he always did, immaculate. His overcoat was of the latest cut; he twirled a cane

that, at a little distance, looked like Malacca; the inevitable carnation was in his buttonhole.

"Hello, Mother!" he said. "Amy here?"

Reluctantly Mrs. Fisher removed the headpiece and laid down the 'phones.

"Our Amy?"

"Yes. Seen anything of her? Isn't she here?" asked Aubrey.

"No. I haven't seen anything of her at all."

"That's funny. I wonder where she can be?"

"Isn't she home?"

"No. I just stopped by there."

"She hasn't been here at all to-day." Mrs. Fisher looked longingly at the radio 'phones; then resentfully picked up her knitting. No use; he wouldn't let any one listen to any one but himself!

"She was saying this morning she thought she'd go out looking for a house to-day. Probably still at it. Well, it's early yet, and there's a lot of ground to cover."

"There's not so much, at that. Not these days. They're not puttin' up many new houses, with everything so high."

"Well, there's a few going up still. You know what they say, Mother Fisher — fools build houses for wise men to live in! Ha-ha-ha!"

"Huh. Good thing somebody puts them up, anyway," said Mrs. Fisher.

"Wish I knew where Amy was. I wanted to take her out to the Automobile Show to-night. I got the loan of Harry Albright's car."

"Did you say she was lookin' for a *house?*"

"Yes. We've got to get out of that place we're in. The Le Page printing people have bought the whole block; they're going to build a new plant there."

"How soon do you have to move?"

"Soon as we can find a place, I suppose. I understand they want to begin tearing down what's there the first of the year, so they can start their foundation work when it begins to get like spring."

"I'm afraid you won't find it easy to get a place as reasonable as that again, Aubrey. I have to give you credit for hittin' on that — you showed good judgment there. But you'll be lucky if you do as well again."

"I don't want a place as reasonable as that if I can find something better!" said Aubrey. "I want a real home. Time I had it, too. I need a real place — one with a bit of ground around it, so I can get in a bit of tennis in the evenings if I feel like it."

"Well, you'll pay for that! Look out there — don't go practicin' your tennis where you'll break something with that stick of yours!"

"Of course I'll pay for it! That's exactly what I expect to do, Mother Fisher, not giving you a short answer — that is exactly what I expect to do. But I want to *get* what I pay for, I'll tell you that. No more of the old first-of-the-month business for this bambino. He's all washed up and signed on the dotted line."

"I don't know where they're puttin' up all these houses you aim to play tennis in."

"Be yourself, Mother Fisher, be yourself."

"Well, where are they?" she insisted.

"You ought to get Pop to take you out along the Boulevard some Sunday — see what they're doing out there."

"There's no danger of *you* goin' out along the Boulevard except for a walk," she said, scornfully.

"Lot of people out that way, and more goin' every week, Mother."

"Maybe. But if there is, they're payin' more than you're able to pay."

"Man's got to live somewhere, Mother. And when he's married, he's got to do right by his wife and the kiddies — if any."

"Well, if he's wise and wants to do the right thing by *them,* he'll live where he's able to pay for his living," said Mrs. Fisher, with decision. "He won't be breakin' up half a dozen times a year, like a lot of them are doin' these days. Makin' a big show — with nothin' back of it. Buyin' ten-thousand-dollar homes and puttin' fifty dollars down on them, and not bein' able to meet the interest on the mortgage when it falls due, never name payin' off any of the principal! Beside, you haven't got the furniture to put into a house, even if you had the house, to begin with."

"The matter of furniture, nowadays, is a very inconsequential matter, little Mother, from what I can gather about it."

"You ought to stop in and look at the prices they're gettin', some time when you're in the city, and see how unconsequent it is."

"I have, Mother Fisher, I have. I've done that very little thing. I've investigated the matter thoroughly and with great care. And I find, Mrs. Fisher, that there are at least fifteen first-class establishments right here in this city that will furnish a man's house from garret to garage and give him the rest of his life to pay for it. They're fighting one another for trade."

"They'd need to give some of them the rest of their lives, all right, at the rate they'd be able to be payin' for anything over and beyond their bare keep."

"Give the growing boy a chance, Mother; give the growing boy a chance! You know what Mr. L. D. Brophy, of the American Tin Can Company, said in the September number of the *American Magazine,* don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, I'll tell you. He said, 'I would say to that innumerable host of young men, standing on the threshold of life, uncertain and mayhap dismayed, as they contemplate the stress of modern industrial competition, "Rome was not built in a day."' Those were his very words. I wouldn't kid you. And I think the old boy's got it right, if you ask me!"

He went toward the door.

"Wish Amy'd come, if she's coming! I want to take her out to the Automobile Show."

"What are *you* goin' out there for?"

"Repeat the question, Mrs. Fisher, if you please."

"You heard me. I says, 'What are *you* goin' out to the Automobile Show for?'"

He laughed wildly.

"Anniversary, Mother. Married five months ago to-day. Got to celebrate the happy event. Besides, one never knows what a day will bring in the way of the opportunity to satisfy a long-felt want. Amy wants a car. Amy must have a car. I don't mind the idea myself. So — some time — some time, mind you, Mother Fisher, we shall have a car. And, as they say opportunity has a way of just knocking once at a man's door, the kid here doesn't want to miss his chance by any foolish uncertainty as to just what choo-choo he prefers."

"Oh, you and your talk! If —"

"Well, got to run along now, Mother. Sorry I can't stay. Have to see if Amy stopped in at the house, after all!"

"What'll I tell her if she does come in here after you've gone?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Oh, tell her I got the loan of Harry Albright's car for the evening, and I want her to see that new Marshall six I was telling her about, out at the show," said Aubrey. "Best buy in the market, from all I hear — a neat job if ever there was one turned out. Balloon tires — hydraulic four-wheel brakes — everything. Tell her I'll be at Childs' at Fifteenth and Chest-

nut until seven o'clock — she can meet me there and drive out to the show with me."

"Fifteenth and Chestnut, eh?"

"That's the said and done, Mother. The old Café des Enfants! Olive oil, Mother!" And off he went.

Unknown to her mother, Amy had come in while Aubrey was talking. She had gone into the parlor — too tired to make any effort — too tired to respond to Aubrey's buoyancy just then.

II

Amy had set out that day to look for a new place to live. But the times were out of joint. The utter dislocation of business that had come with the war, the distortion of plans that had happened in every great industrial district of the country, had afflicted Philadelphia and its environs with a peculiar virulence.

Building had ceased altogether, in 1917, to follow normal lines of development. The sudden creation of vast new plants for ships and guns and shells, like those at Hog Island and Bristol and other places along the Delaware, had made housing projects necessary. The government had flung money into these with seem-

ing recklessness; all over America, indeed, colonies of stucco and frame buildings had sprung up with the speed of mushrooms. Comparatively few had been finished before the Armistice; by the time they were ready for occupancy orders had come to slow down construction programs in shipyards and ordnance plants.

Here and there one of these housing projects fitted into the ordinary life of a community and served its needs. But too often their sites bore no relation to the normal development of cities and towns, or were far ahead of such progress as might, in the course of a decade or so, bring the town to them.

Upon the national housing problem, however, these projects had had a profound and lasting effect that was designed to work havoc with many lives like Amy's. The sudden and arbitrary repeal of the laws of supply and demand in 1917 had been necessary; in no other way could that vast, coördinated national effort that was prepared, by the time the German armies collapsed, to put an overwhelming and irresistible force in the field for the campaign of the spring of 1919 that was never fought, have been achieved.

But the enormous cohesive force that held the

nation together, that unified and regulated its effort through the period of the war, did not survive the Armistice by many weeks. It was as though some great mass that had been magnetized had suddenly lost its magnetism; the whole huge machine flew apart, as it were. The skill, the brains, the talent, that had been at the nation's command for the positive task of creation were lost when they were most needed. Mobilization had been conducted with extraordinary success and efficiency, on the whole, and with as little waste as human limitations permitted in a democracy. Demobilization, however, once the armies were brought home, was allowed largely to take care of itself. The 'dollar a year' men were back at their hundred thousand dollar a year jobs; war powers were relinquished with frantic haste; the whole effort was to restore, superficially, conditions that could never be the same again.

The unprecedented demands upon industry and upon raw materials affected — and still, to a great extent, continue to affect — every phase of the national life in the period that followed the war. The normal processes of distribution were dislocated; trade was obliged to cut new channels for itself. To inflation there succeeded

inevitably a period of deflation; the depression of 1921 was as costly, as hard to live through, as the more sensational panics of years like 1907 and 1893.

Of these things Amy had no knowledge as she carried on her search for a home that she and Aubrey could afford. Yet it was because of them that, wherever she went, she found that the rent demanded for what poor quarters were to be had was out of all proportion to the family income. Thousands of Amys were having a similar experience. Labor, during the war, was able to force its wage up until it bore some relation to the increased cost of living. But clerical workers, unorganized, in the mass unintelligent, had achieved no such balance; they had been forced to a lowering of their standards of living, an acceptance of conditions that threatened to become intolerable.

Evening found Amy worn out, discouraged, utterly cast down. She had spent most of the day on her feet; she had walked, partly to save carfare, and partly because, after all, nearly all the places she had to see were off the car lines. She was dragging one foot wearily after the other when at last she reached her father's house. And when she heard Aubrey's voice,

resonant, enthusiastic, fresh, in the living room, she sighed wearily and went quietly into the parlor, to sit there in the dark, her eyes closed, resting. Not until he had gone and she heard the front door slam did she get up and go into the room where her mother was.

"Hello!" she said, without spirit.

"Amy! Is that you? You frightened me, walkin' in that way like a ghost! Where did you come from?"

"In there," said Amy, pointing to the parlor.

"When did you come in?"

"Oh, a couple of minutes ago. I was tired — I just sat down to rest a minute in the dark. It's so sort of peaceful, Mom."

"Why, your man was in — he's just now gone out. Didn't you meet him as you came in?"

"No. I heard him, though, when I came in."

"He's been lookin' for you. He wants you to go to some sort of automobile show with him — he's got the loan of some zany's car for the evening, he says."

"I know. I heard him tellin' you. I don't want to go, though. I'm too tired."

"What'll he do about his supper — ?"

"I told him to get something in town. I knew I'd be late getting home to-night."

"Oh, yeh — I remember. He said he'd eat at Childs', Fifteenth and Chestnut, and you was to meet him there. He said he'd be there till seven o'clock."

"I guess I won't go, Mom. I guess I'll just rest. I'm too tired to eat, anyway."

"There's plenty here if you want to stay," said Mrs. Fisher. "He tells me you've got to get out of that place you're in."

"Yes, they're going to tear all those houses down pretty soon, now. That's what I was doin' to-day — lookin' around for some other place."

"Did you see anything?"

"Oh, I saw a couple of places that were fair. But they want too much money, everywhere you go."

"I'm afraid that's what you'll be finding everywhere, Amy. Reason you got that place so cheap where you are was on account they knew it was going to be torn down, I shouldn't wonder."

"Likely. There was a place I saw — thirty-eight dollars a month, for a little two-story house that didn't even have a front porch."

"Well, you're surely not looking for a house, Amy, are you?"

"I am if I can find one," said Amy.

"Didn't you have any idea what they were askin' for houses these days before you started out?"

"Well, Aubrey says he just *will not* live in rooms any longer."

"What the devil does it matter what he says?" asked Mrs. Fisher, explosively. "He don't know what he's saying half the time, anyhow. It's you that has to stretch the money, and it won't only go so far, no matter how hard you try. The money that *he* gets won't cover any forty-dollar rents. You can make your mind up to that before you go any farther. And that's the cheapest you'll find — and not many for that little, mind what I'm tellin' you."

"He doesn't want to rent. He wants to buy."

"Buy? What on? Thirty-two dollars a week? The man's crazy!"

"He says he can put it into a new building society he's heard about, over in Frankford," said Amy, on the defensive.

"He'd have to pay the building society, wouldn't he? That's a good way if you've got some money of your own to start with, like we did when we began buyin' this place."

"Well, he wouldn't have to pay it all at once, you know, Mom."

"There'd be more onces than he'd be able to meet, even so. My land, Amy, I thought you had a little sense left, but you're as bad as him, seems to me."

"Oh, you make me tired, Mom," Amy returned, growing irritable. "You talk so silly, just because you don't like Aubrey. You'd think every one that was married was living out on the street, to hear you."

"Well, Amy, that's where a lot of them would be living, only that somebody belonging to them is giving them a helping hand," Mrs. Fisher said, soberly. "Money won't only go just so far, Amy. And I've been keeping house too long not to know just how far that far is. Nobody can tell me anything about that."

"But, Mom, there was a girl down at our office got married just before I was married, and the fellow she married didn't get as much money even as Aubrey gets — he got about twenty-five dollars a week for bein' a guard in the Corn Exchange Bank. Well, and *they* bought a house, out in Kensington, and they say it's beautiful."

"She's back at her job, though, isn't she?"

Amy flushed before she answered. "She never left her job."

"Well, that's how she's doin' it. If they both work, young folk can buy houses and all sorts of things they want. You told me yourself there was five girls, just in your office, that have been married in the last two years. Do you think they're hangin' over books and files nine hours a day just because they like to? And you haven't any furniture, even if you did get a house."

"Oh, you can always get furniture!"

"Certainly you can get furniture if you can pay for it," Mrs. Fisher said, pointedly. "But I don't see how you're aimin' to do all these wonders later on when you can't make ends meet now, with only the rent of two cheap rooms to pay. You're everlastin' borrowin' from me as it is."

"I always pay you, don't I?" asked Amy.

"You do when you get it. But that's not the point, Amy; it's that what you get one week don't last you till the next. Suppose you was took sick, one of you, or — oh, think of the things that can happen, Amy!"

"The reason I was short last week, Aubrey bought that new overcoat."

"Yeh. And next week it'll be something else," said her mother.

"Well, a man can't be goin' around shabby,

Mom, in a position like Aubrey's. He says he's not nearly eighty clerks in his department, and he says unless he sets some kind of an example of personal appearance, he says there's some of them there that'd come down to work in overalls."

"Tcht! Amy, I can't make you out! How is it a girl that was smart enough to do the work you did has so little sense when it comes to what a man tells you?"

"Who do you mean? Aubrey?"

"Who else?"

"I'd like to know what he tells me that I've so little sense about?" Amy wanted to know.

"Well, about his having eighty clerks under him, just for one thing." Mrs. Fisher was scornful.

"So he has."

"And gets thirty-two dollars a week?"

"He gets thirty-two fifty," said Amy. "Oh, you needn't go shakin' your head at me like that, Mom. You know yourself what the Pennsylvania Railroad pays its men."

"I don't know what anybody pays anybody."

"Well, the Pennsylvania's notorious. Aubrey says that only that a couple of things haven't panned out just the way he counted on them yet,

he'd have left them long ago. He says they just try to break a man's spirit down there. He says that's one of the main reasons he's so particular about his looks — he says he just wouldn't give them the satisfaction of thinking he ever had any sort of hard time."

"How much did he pay for that overcoat? I was noticin' it when he was in here."

"Thirty-eight dollars. Oh, he didn't have to pay it all at once — the man said, on account it was so near Christmas, that he could let it go until the first of February next year."

"Yeh. And I s'pose he'll be wantin' a suit now, to go with his new overcoat, next thing we hear," said Mrs. Fisher.

"No, his suit's all right — yet awhile. This one of mine's beginning to go, though. I've worn it so long I'm tired lookin' at it."

"People can't get things so handy, once they're married, Amy. I told you that before, and you wouldn't listen."

"I thought I'd be able to put somethin' away this week, toward buyin' a suit for myself," said Amy. "I don't know where the money went — it just seems to go! Honestly, I had exactly twelve cents in my purse when Aubrey gave me his pay."

"Well, I don't know what'll become of you, Amy, if you ever have a houseful of children to keep."

Amy looked at her mother, startled. No one knew her secret yet; not even Aubrey. The tears started in her eyes; she slumped down suddenly, her head on her folded arms, and began to cry quietly. Her mother sighed; she got up, and crossed over to Amy, and her hand was gentle as she dropped it on the bent head.

"Now, there's no use startin' that kind of thing, Amy," she said. "It won't do you a bit of good or make anything you've got to go through with a bit easier."

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Mom!" Amy cried. "I'm nearly crazy with worrying about things!"

"Well, I'll tell you what you're going to do, Amy, if you're a wise woman. You're going to sit down with yourself and realize you're married, and that you've got a house of some kind to keep up, and just so much money comin' in each week to keep it up on. And you'll suit your ideas accordin'—"

"Oh, Mom, that's so easy to *say!*"

"Never be tellin' me how hard it is to *do,* Amy—I found that out before ever you were

born. But, easy or hard, that's what you'll have to do, and if you don't you'll have plenty of cryin' to do, and little time to do it in. And you'll have nobody to thank but yourself, for you had nothin' but impudence for them that tried to tell you how many beans make five before it was too late."

"Oh —" Amy started up, but her indignant answer was cut off by the sound of the front door opening. "Who's that comin' in?"

"It's your father, most like. Go into the parlor, now, and sit till you've stopped cryin' and your eyes ain't so red. Don't be lettin' him see you cryin'. He's got enough to think about when he comes home all tired from his work without that."

"All right, Mom — I — I'm sorry —"

And she went obediently into the parlor. But it was not Mr. Fisher who came in; it was Clara. She looked flushed and anxious.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "What's wrong?"

"There's nothing at all the matter that I know of," said Mrs. Fisher.

"What did Joe telephone to me for, then?"

"Our Joe? I didn't know he had telephoned."

"Well, he did. Bertha said he telephoned

about four o'clock and told her to tell me to come right over as soon as I came in."

"Come over *here?*"

"Yes. That's what she said," Clara insisted.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what he'd want of you, Clara. He didn't say anything when he left the house to go to work this morning."

"Well, I came right over. I was out paying my Electric, and I got the message when I got back, and I came right over. I thought there was something wrong, maybe, and he was telephoning from next door."

"No. He hasn't been home all day. He must have called up from where he works or somewhere around there."

"I wonder what he wanted! Scares you, sort of, getting a message like that," Clara said, nervously.

"Oh, it's probably a mistake — it was some one else wanted some one and got the wrong number. Is that girl at your house sure it was our Joe?"

"She said it was, and she ought to know his voice — she's answered the telephone before when he was callin' up about something."

"Well, wait a bit and you'll find out. He'll be here at six, you know."

"Maybe — Mom — do you suppose he's heard from those people that were interested in that formula of his?"

"Oh, I guess our Joe'll be an old man before he ever hears from them! Here — if you're just sittin' around doin' nothin' you can mend this cloth for me — see where it's going? I've got to see about your Pop's dinner — he'll be in about six, too."

III

Aubrey Piper stopped at home, after he had left Amy's old house, but, of course, did not find her. He was not at all cast down; he was singularly free from the habit of making petty exactions. He went downtown cheerfully; waited a while at Childs' before he ate his dinner, and stood around outside afterward, on the off chance that Amy would appear. She did not come, and after a time he glanced at his watch and strolled off.

Harry Albright was waiting for him at the garage where he kept his car. He was a salesman, an old friend of Aubrey's, who had the free use of a small coupé for his business, although he did not own it.

"Hello, Harry — how's everything?" said Aubrey.

"Fine and dandy. Goin' out to look 'em over, are you? Well, you can go farther and do a lot worse than pick up one of Henry's latest models, like this baby."

"For me — that's right. Got to think of other things, though, Harry. Now, this car's just what you need, running around the way you do. But a man in my position's got to think of appearances, too. And there's the wife — I'm afraid I'd get in bad if I drove a flivver home."

"Oh, well, I don't say I wouldn't rather have a Packard, myself! But a flivver's handy in traffic, and it's easy to park her — you can get in places when you'd have to drive around half an hour with a big car. All right — bring her back here, will you, Aubrey?"

"Sure. That's the said and done. Much obliged, Harry."

"Don't mention it. There's lots of gas — everything's k. o."

Aubrey slid out into the traffic easily. It was a little strange at first; he hadn't driven a car for a long time, and he understood a Ford, in fact, only theoretically. He was used to a car with the ordinary transmission; he had to

experiment a good deal and stalled the engine two or three times, before he mastered the foot-work required. It was disconcerting, too, not to have the car stop when he jammed both feet down hard.

But he soon got the trick; found his left foot automatically hovering in just the right position when he wanted to throw the clutch out. And there was something enormously thrilling for him in sitting at the wheel of a car — any car. Bigger machines might pass him contemptuously, but most of the people in the world, after all, were afoot. They always would be.

And it was easy, too, to imagine that it was not a Ford he drove, but the car of his dreams — his own car. The car he would select, a little later, at the show. He rehearsed, in his mind, the questions he meant to ask the salesmen. Before he signed on the dotted line he'd know what he was getting! They couldn't put anything over on him, the way they did on most of the hicks that bought new cars. Gasoline consumption — tire mileage — oil consumption — had to think of things like that, because, with any car, it wasn't the first cost that got you, it was the upkeep. Then — balloon tires. He wasn't absolutely sold on those yet. They cut

down speed — and he'd want to be able to burn up the road when he once got out of town.

Lots of things to think about. The six was the car, of course, but over in Europe, lately, they'd been going in for high-speed four-cylinder motors of small bore and short stroke. Got thirty miles and more to the gallon, some of them did — cost almost nothing to run. Might pay to look into those foreign cars, too, before he made his final decision. Thing was, though, that if you had to have repairs you might have trouble getting parts. Better stick to the old U. S. A., probably.

He was running comfortably along Broad Street now. No need to worry about traffic. Lots of room for every one. Room to try out a car here, and see how she steered. Just as well; Harry had too much play in his steering gear to suit Aubrey. Then, abruptly, he was conscious of a grinding noise beside him; he looked over and saw the car on the inside sliding to a stop. A bell clanged; a man in blue was gesticulating; people were shouting. He jammed both feet down; the car continued to move. Too late he remembered the emergency brake; he was conscious of an amazed, white face before him as the car hit something soft and yielding; the

next instant the car was bumped violently, and he felt something sting his head as the windshield was shattered into a thousand pieces.

Still, with horrid sounds, the car moved on. But in a moment it stopped; Aubrey, sick and shaken, looked about, to see a crowd surging about him.

"The cop's dead — he hit the cop — say — the trolley never jarred him when it hit him — pretty lucky —"

A confusion of voices rose all about him. Then, abruptly, the crowd gave way; from behind came the sharp chatter of a motorcycle exhaust; an authoritative voice was in his ear, and another man in blue was beside him, one foot on the running board.

"Come on — pull over to the curb, there," said the officer. "Make it snappy, too — we don't want traffic tied up all the way back to Market Street!"

Somehow Aubrey managed to obey. Already he was coming back.

"All right — hold her there. Let's see your license," said the officer.

"I — I haven't it with me, officer."

"Left it home? Sure you've got one?" The policeman was sarcastic.

"I — well — er — the fact is — I forgot to renew it this year. I want to tell you about that —" Aubrey began.

"You can tell that to the judge. Wait here, now, till I find out how bad Casey's hurt."

Other policemen appeared, as if by magic. The crowd was pushed back. One officer waited, leaning on the Ford.

"Who was dom fool enough to let you out in a car?" he inquired.

"That'll be about all from you," said Aubrey. "You men had better learn something about regulating traffic before you abuse citizens!"

"Abuse citizens, is it? How about poor Casey, that may be dead or dyin', and him with a wife and three children?"

"If Casey is the officer who was misdirecting traffic at this crossing —" said Aubrey, seizing the opening.

"Take it easy, now. He's got friends here, and I'm wan of them."

"Well, you'd better tell him to be careful about how he waves his hand, then, and puts a man in the way of being run into by a trolley car. I've got a case against the city if I want to bring suit."

"And the city's got a case against you, too."

"We'll see about that." Aubrey was angry now!

"Here — get away from that wheel —" Another policeman cut in. "Bill — you drive. We want to get Casey over to the house. He's hurt bad — arm's broken. The doc ought to see him right away."

One of the other policemen held Aubrey's arm. The car was driven swiftly away. A man stepped out of the crowd.

"Hello, Aubrey," said Frank Hyland. "What's the trouble here?"

"Why, the cop here got to dreamin' and waved the traffic on along Broad first and then across from Erie Avenue! And then he walks right into me while I'm driving across, as he told me to. And now they're trying to frame up a case against *me* to get him clear."

"I see," said Frank Hyland, quietly. He turned to the policeman. "This man's my brother-in-law, officer," he said. "Is he under arrest?"

"I'll say he is! And lucky for him it's not a homicide case — no fault of his from what I hear."

"Where will he be taken?" asked Frank.

"Twenty-second and Hunting Park Avenue police station — first."

"Will they accept bail there?"

"Hard tellin', friend. Depends on how bad Casey's hurt. Better come over and talk to the loot'nt on the desk."

"They've got no case against me, Frank," Aubrey insisted. "It's the other way around. Why, a trolley car hit me —"

"I know. I was on the car. We'll get it fixed up some way, Aubrey," Frank said, reassuringly.

"If you were on the car you can be a witness. I want to get the names of all the people who saw the accident —"

"Don't worry, bo. We've got them," said the policeman. "Here's the wagon now. Up with you — it's only a short ride."

"You'll answer for this!" Aubrey warned them. "I'm going to find out whether a citizen can be hustled about in a patrol wagon this way so that a drunken cop can be protected —"

"Go easy, Aubrey," said Frank warningly. "They're too many for you. You'll have your chance to explain things later."

CHAPTER VIII

I

OVER the Fisher house there brooded the shadow of some unknown and formidable event. Time was passing; at six o'clock, at seven, at half-past, neither Mr. Fisher nor Joe had come home.

"Don't worry, Mom," said Clara. "Joe's had something turn up — I'll bet it's about that invention of his, and that he and Pop had to go somewhere to see about it. They'll come in together pretty soon."

"It's not like either of them — I hope nothing's gone wrong," said Mrs. Fisher. "Seems as if I couldn't stand much more, Clara, what with the way prices keep going up, and now the way I've got to be worrying about Amy."

"What's wrong with her?" asked Clara.

"Oh, nothing special — except they've got to move from them rooms they've got. Did you hear that?"

"Yes. Frank was telling me. They're going to tear down that whole block, he says. What's

Amy going to do, Mom? Come here to live?"

"Oh, now, that's a sensible question for you to be askin', Clara," replied Mrs. Fisher. "You know how much she's comin' here to live."

"Well, I don't know where else they're goin', with rents the way they are. Unless she goes back to work. And she wouldn't want to do that."

"She'll have to look around, that's all."

"What good will that do her, Mom? She certainly won't find anything as reasonable as where she is now, and when she's not able to pay that, how does she expect to pay any more?"

Amy heard her, where she was sitting in the parlor. She had been dozing, lying down on the couch; something had aroused her. And she flung into the living room, now, like a fury.

"How do *you* know I'm not able to pay my rent where I am?" she asked.

"Now, don't you be starting a fight, Amy," said her mother. "Your Pop'll be here any minute, and I won't have him disturbed when he's tired."

"All right, Mom, but I'd like to know what business of hers it is whether I can pay my rent or not! I don't see that anybody's asking her to pay it for me if I can't!"

"It's a bit late in the day to be talking that way to me, Amy," answered Clara steadily. "Your husband's been to Frank Hyland twice already to get the money to pay it for you. That's what business it is of mine."

"Now, then, both of you —" said Mrs. Fisher.

"Oh, it's all very well, Mom!" said Clara. "But it's time Amy quit this posing in front of me! I know how she's fixed better than she does herself."

"Do you hear that, Mom? The way she lies and goes on —" cried Amy angrily.

"Stop your shoutin', Amy. Do you want your Pop to walk in and hear you?" Mrs. Fisher interrupted.

"But she says Aubrey's been to Frank Hyland twice for the loan of our rent, Mom!"

"So he has!" Clara was sure of her ground.

"You're a liar, Clara Hyland!"

"Stop it, Amy!" Mrs. Fisher, tried past all patience, slapped her. "I won't have it, I tell you!"

"Then let her stop her lyin'—"

"Will you stop when I speak to you? What kind of talk do you call that!"

"Well, I don't care — that's what she's doin'!

Aubrey Piper never asked Frank Hyland for a cent in his life!" Amy insisted.

"I tell you he's asked him a dozen times — and got it, too, till I put a stop to it!" said Clara.

"Now, that'll do, Clara," said Mrs. Fisher. "I don't want to hear another word out of either one of you. I got enough of that sort of thing while the two of you were home here."

"Well, she ought to prove what she said about Aubrey Piper, just the same, Mom, and you know it!" cried Amy.

"It's very easily proved, Amy. I'm not trying to torment you. Just come over to the house and I'll show you the letters he wrote."

"What do you do — open Frank Hyland's mail?" Amy asked, scornfully.

"I do now, yes — when I know who it's from," replied Clara calmly.

"Do you mean to tell me, Clara," asked Mrs. Fisher keenly, "that he's writing to Frank Hyland for money?"

"No, he never did anything of the kind, Mom!" cried Amy. "That's just another of her lies! She hates me, and she's jealous because Aubrey's the way he is with me —"

"I'm not talkin' to you, Amy. I'm askin' Clara somethin'," her mother interrupted.

"But she just makes those things up, Mom, I'm tellin' you! I know what Aubrey Piper does—"

"I make them *up*—!" repeated Clara.

"Yes!"

"When I've got at least twelve letters right in my top bureau drawer this minute that he's written within the last two months!"

"What does he write letters for?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"For money! So he can pay seven dollars for a seat out at the football game, like he did Thanksgiving. Frank saw him there."

"But why don't he just ask Frank Hyland for the money when he sees him, instead of writing him letters about it?" asked Mrs. Fisher, puzzled.

"I suppose he thinks it's more dignified to write, him being one of the heads of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the way he says he is!"

"How much does he ask for, when he does write?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Well, there was one a couple of weeks ago when he wanted three hundred."

"Listen to that, will you!" cried Amy.

"Three hundred dollars!" echoed Mrs. Fisher, aghast.

"That's what the letter said."

"But — What in the world would he have wanted three hundred dollars for, Amy?"

"Oh, ask her, Mom! She's so good at makin' things up, maybe she'll be able to tell you!"

"Oh, you! You wouldn't believe it against him, even if we all knew it was true," cried her mother in exasperation.

"Well, I wouldn't believe *her,* anyway; I'll tell you both that much!"

"You wouldn't believe your own mother — never name your sister!" Amy, in tears, flung herself out of the room, slamming the parlor door behind her. "It's no use talkin' to her, Clara," Mrs. Fisher continued. "She flew at me like a wildcat when I told her he wore a wig. I guess she knows it herself by this time."

"She's for *him,* Mom, and the sooner you get that into your head the better."

"I know very well she is. You needn't tell me. She'd turn on any one belongin' to her for him, too, and I know it. The idea of askin' anybody for three hundred dollars! I suppose he wanted to buy an automobile or something with it. That's where he is — right this minute. Out at the automobile show — and him with not two nickels to rub against one another in his pocket!

And I'll bet he'll be doin' more talkin' out there than them that'll buy a dozen cars."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit if that wasn't just what he did want the money for," said Clara.

"It wouldn't surprise me — the damned fool! It'd be fitter for him to be thinkin' of getting a place to live in and a roof over their two heads."

"Oh, he doesn't think he needs to think about that, Mom. He thinks he's coming in here."

"Comin' in here to live, do you mean? Him?" Mrs. Fisher was amazed.

"That's what he told Frank the day before yesterday. That's all I know about it, Mom."

"Well, he's very much mistaken if he does, I can tell you that," said Mrs. Fisher, vehemently. "I'd like to be listenin' to that fellow seven days in the week, wouldn't I! I'd rather go over and live with your Aunt Ellie in Newark."

"Well, that's about what you'll have to be doin', Mom, if you ever let them in on you," Clara warned her.

"I won't let them in on me, never you fret. Your father 'ud have something to say about that, too, and don't you be forgetting that, either."

"Pop may not always be here, Mom."

"Well, I'll be here, if he isn't. And the furniture's mine. And there's very little danger of my walkin' out and leavin' it to my son-in-law. My God — there's the door! I guess it's your Pop at last, and the kettle not even on, with me standin' here listenin' to the two of you fightin', like you was still in short skirts!"

She hurried out. But it was Joe who came in. And the moment Clara saw his face she knew what had happened.

II

"Oh — you got here, did you, Clara?" said Joe. "I couldn't come any sooner. Where's Mom?"

"Out in the kitchen — why? What's wrong, Joe? I got your message and came right over."

"Come close, here — don't let her hear us. Listen, Clara — Pop had some kind of a stroke this afternoon, at his work."

"Pop did? Oh, Joe!"

"They found him layin' in front of one of the boilers," said Joe.

"Oh, my God!"

"*You* better tell Mom. Break it to her kind of easy."

"Oh — ! Joe — !"

"What?"

"Where's Pop now?"

"They took him to the Samaritan Hospital. I been there — I just came from there. I was waitin' to see the doctor after he'd seen Pop again."

"They must have telephoned you, didn't they?"

"Yeh. They found a card in his pocket with my name and where I worked on it. He must have thought something like that might happen to him some time when he was all alone."

"Do you think he's very bad, Joe?"

"*I* think he's done, Clara. The doctor wouldn't tell me he thought there was much chance for him."

"Oh, don't say that, Joe! Think how it would be for Mom if he — went —"

"Well, it don't look so good, Clara. He hasn't regained consciousness since they took him in there, and the doctors all said he looked pretty bad from the first."

"Well — but what can we do, Joe?"

"There's nothing we can do, I guess. You better tell Mom, and have her get her things on, and we'll go down there. I've got to change my

clothes — I didn't have time to wash up, even — I went right over from work."

Clara stood still a moment, swaying, as she tried to realize the meaning of what she had heard. Then, as Joe started up the stairs, she called him again.

"The Samaritan Hospital — that's at Broad and Ontario, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Amy, white and scared, opened the parlor door. She had heard some part of what Joe had said. Now she stared at Clara, her eyes full of tears, her look as pitiful as that of a frightened child.

"What is it, Clara?" she asked. Then, swiftly, she made a faint gesture of warning, and Clara turned and saw her mother coming in from the kitchen.

"Wasn't that your Pop came in just then?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"No — no — that was — oh, it was the boy with the paper — he was late to-night, too," said Clara.

"Clara!" Amy's voice cut in sharply. "What on earth — ?"

"What's the matter here?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "Clara — you're crying —"

"I don't know — it's something Joe told her, Mom. He just came in and went upstairs —"

"What is it, Clara? Something about your father — is that what you're crying for?"

Clara stood, dumbly, looking from her mother to her sister.

"Why don't you tell her, Clara?" Amy asked sharply.

"Go and call Joe, Amy!" said Mrs. Fisher. "Something's happened to your father — I know it."

"Wait a minute —" Clara made an effort. "It's nothing to get upset about, Mom. He just took a little spell of some kind at his work this afternoon and they — they took him to the hospital so they could take care of him better in case it was worse than they thought. And Joe — he just came from there — he's been down there with Pop, Mom, and he says we ought to get our things on and go down there."

Mrs. Fisher stared. She swayed a little, as if Clara's words had been so many blows. Amy went to her quickly, and helped her toward a chair.

"Here," she said. "Sit down here, Mom."

"What's she saying — what's it that's hap-

pened to your father, Amy?" Mrs. Fisher asked, in a dazed voice.

"Now, it's nothing to get excited about, Mom," said Clara. "It might be just a little heart attack or something like that he took."

"There's never been anything the matter with your Pop's heart, Clara. Not since I've known him, there hasn't."

"Well, but, Mom, it gets awful hot there, where Pop works — you know how often he's talked about that, Mom, yourself.— And men at Pop's age are always taking little spells of some kind."

"Ah, but I guess it's a stroke he's had, Clara. Poor Pop!"

"It might not be, Mom. You can't tell. Let's wait till we know for sure just what it was."

"That's how his two brothers went, though, you know."

"Well, we've got to get down there, Mom," said Clara. "Amy, you'd better go next door and telephone to Frank Hyland. Tell him what's happened and that I won't be home — he'll go to the hospital to meet us, most likely. Leave word, if he's not there — tell him to come right down to the Samaritan Hospital as soon as he can."

"I'd better ask Johnny Harbison to run down

to the corner and get a taxicab, too, hadn't I?" asked Amy.

"Yes — that's a good idea — that's the best way to go —"

"Is that where your father is, Clara — the Samaritan Hospital?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Yes, it's right down there near where he works, at Broad and Ontario."

"Oh, your poor father — I wonder what happened to him!" said Mrs. Fisher, with a sob.

"Now, there's no use looking on the dark side of it already, Mom. He'll probably be a lot better when we get there."

"Yes — but I'm thinkin'— me out there, getting his supper and him not coming home to it at all. And maybe never coming home to it again, Clara, for all we know."

"He'll be home again, all right, Mom. You'll see. Why, Pop's a strong man. He's never been sick since I can remember."

Mrs. Fisher was silent. She was staring straight ahead of her, with eyes that saw nothing. Suddenly she spoke, in a strange, tight voice.

"I guess he's dead now and you're not telling me," she said.

"No, he isn't, Mom. Truly he isn't. I'd tell you if he was — I'd never dare not to, Mom."

"What did Joe say, Clara?"

"Just what I told you — that he'd taken a spell of some kind, while he was at work."

"Well, why didn't he tell *me?* He had a right to do that. What's he doin' upstairs, anyway?"

"He's changin' out of his working clothes, Mom. He's goin' right down there with us."

"I guess he's cryin'— that's why he's so long. He don't want me to see him. You know, it'll kill our Joe, Clara, if anything happens to your father."

"You'd better get fixed up a little, Mom. Joe says we should go down there right away. Why don't you go upstairs and get ready? Here — I'll take your apron."

"Oh, I don't know whether I'll be able to dress myself or not. My hands feel just like lead."

"You don't need to get all dressed up, Mom; just put on your black silk waist — that skirt's plenty good enough."

"Well, I'm not goin' down there lookin' like a Dago woman."

"Nobody'll see you in the dark — and nobody'll think about what you've got on, Mom, anyway. They'll understand."

"It won't be dark in the hospital, Clara — how you talk! It won't be dark unless something's happened to the lights. Put that gas out under the potatoes, Clara — I just lit it. And you'd better pick this room up a bit while I'm upstairs — you don't know who might be comin' in if they hear about your father.— Oh, dear — oh, dear — oh, dear — I don't know what I'm doin'!" cried Mrs. Fisher, as she wandered distractedly around the room. "Take them papers off the table and put them in the kitchen, Clara, will you?"

"Yes, Mom — all right — I'll take care of everything. Don't you worry. You'd better bring your umbrella when you come down — it looked like rain when I came in."

"Oh, dear — and I let our Amy take my rubbers, the last time she was here, and she *never* brings anything back once she borrows it!"

"You won't need rubbers — we're going in a taxi."

"Oh, but I get my feet all wet, when I don't have rubbers — my God — look at him! What's happened to *you,* now?"

Aubrey had come in, unnoticed and unheard in the excitement. His head was bandaged; his wig was gone; he looked, for once, a little out

of countenance. But the carnation was still in his coat.

"It's beginning to rain," he said casually.

"Never mind the rain — it wasn't the rain did that to you," said Mrs. Fisher, with a gesture toward the bandage. "I guess you ran into something, didn't you?"

"Now, don't get excited, Mother Fisher — just a little misunderstanding on the part of the traffic officer."

"You don't mean to tell me you ran into a traffic officer!"

"Control yourself, Little Mother — control yourself. I assure you there is no occasion for undue solicitude. Good evening, Mrs. Hyland."

"Aubrey — what on earth happened to your head?" asked Clara.

"You look like a bandit!" said Mrs. Fisher.

"The veriest trifle, Mrs. Hyland — it bled a little, at first. Just a little spray from the windshield, that's all. Just goes to show what I've always said — they oughtn't to use anything but that new glass that won't splinter anywhere about an automobile."

"Well, where's the car you borrowed — smashed, I guess, ain't it?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"The car I borrowed, Mother Fisher, is now

in the hands of the bandits of the law. The judicial gentlemen who have entered into a conspiracy with the so-called regulators of traffic in this city to collect fines from the motoring public by — by having the police order them to go one way and then say in court they told them to go the other."

"Never mind your fancy talk now — we've all heard enough of that. What I want to know is who you killed or what you did run into — I know you ran into somethin'. And where's the automobile that some one was fool enough to lend you?"

"The automobile, Little Mother, I am happy to assure you, is quite safe and only slightly damaged. It is parked and pasturing in the courtyard of the Twenty-second and Hunting Park Avenue police station."

"Did you get arrested, too, then?"

"I accompanied the officers as far as the station — yes. And I told them a few things when I got there about the condition of traffic in this city, too, I can tell you!"

"I guess they told you a few things, too, didn't they?" said Mrs. Fisher.

"I beg your pardon, Mother Fisher?"

"Never mind — you're welcome!"

"You'd better change your shoes, Mom — you don't want to go down there in those you've got on," said Clara.

"All right — all right. See if my long black coat's in the cellarway, there. That fellow's got me so upset I don't know what I'm doing. Here — let me get upstairs —"

Aubrey, puzzled, ruffled in his dignity by his inability to keep the center of the stage, sat down.

"What did they do, Aubrey?" Clara asked. "Fine you?"

"They were all set to fine me, but before I got through with them they didn't have a leg to stand on. So they tried to cover themselves up as gracefully as possible by trumping up a charge against me of driving an automobile without a license."

"What did they do, then? Take the automobile away from you?" she asked.

"Nothing of the sort — they simply did, finally, the only thing they could do — followed the usual procedure in a case of this sort, which is to release the defendant on bail pending determination of the extent of the victim's injuries."

"Was there somebody injured, then?"

"The traffic cop that ran into me — yes," Aubrey admitted.

"For God's sake — couldn't you find anybody but a traffic cop to run into?" cried Clara.

"I did not run into him, Mrs. Hyland — you don't understand the circumstances."

"Well, I understand this much about them — they could give you ten years for a thing like that! Serve you right if they did, too — borrowin' an automobile you don't know any more about runnin' than I do."

"No time like the present to learn, Clara."

"Well, you'll likely have plenty of time from now on, if that cop's badly hurt. Was he, do you know?"

"He was faking a broken arm when I left. I s'pose they'll have it in splints to-morrow to make out a case."

"A broken arm! My God, Aubrey — !"

"Well, it's a wonder to me the poor straw-ride wasn't signed on the dotted line right there and then. He ran head on right into me."

"Was he in a car, too?"

"No, he was jay-walking — trying to beat me to the corner after waving to me to go ahead."

"Where did all this happen?" asked Clara.

"Broad and Erie Avenue."

"Did they take the cop to the hospital?"

"I guess so — went to the station house first, in my car."

"They didn't let you run it, did they?"

"Repeat the question, Mrs. Hyland?"

"You heard me — I don't need to repeat it. Take that silly-looking bandage off your head before Amy comes in and gets the life frightened out of her. She's got enough to worry her now without seeing you looking like that."

Aubrey started up and took off the handkerchief that was bound around his head."

"Is my wife here, did you say?" he asked.

"She's next door, telephoning. Oh, Aubrey — Pop had a stroke of some kind at his work this afternoon. Joe just told us — just before you came in —"

"What are you doing — kidding me?"

"No, of course I'm not kidding you!" cried Clara, bursting into tears. "What would I be kidding you about a thing like that for?"

"Where is he now?"

"They took him to the Samaritan Hospital. We're just going down there now to see how he is."

Amy came in as Clara spoke. She saw at once that something was wrong with Aubrey.

"What's the matter, Aubrey?" she asked.

"Well!" he said, and opened his arms to her. "The old kid herself!"

"What is it, Aubrey?"

"Nothing in the world for you to worry about, baby," he said, kissing her.

"Did you get Frank, Amy?" asked Clara.

"He wasn't home yet. I left word for him."

"Clara —" Mrs. Fisher came down the stairs, calling. "Is that automobile cab here yet?"

"It'll be here in a minute, Mom," said Amy. "Johnny Harbison's gone for it."

"All right. What do you think of this fellow now, Amy? Runnin' wild through the city, breaking policemen's arms. As if we didn't have enough trouble without that, with your poor father layin' dead, for all we know, down in the Jewish hospital. It's enough to make a body light-headed."

"Did you find your coat, Mom?" asked Clara.

"No — isn't it in the cellarway?"

"No — I just looked there."

"It must be upstairs, then. Joe — !"

"I thought you were going out to the Automobile Show, Aubrey?" said Amy.

"Well. I had a little mix-up at Broad and Erie Avenue, Amy —"

"You didn't get hurt, did you?" That was all Amy cared about.

"Nothing to speak of — just a little scratch or two, here on my forehead, from the glass in the windshield when it broke."

"He nearly killed a traffic officer — that's how much of a little mix-up it was!" said Mrs. Fisher, shrilly.

"You *didn't,* Aubrey, did you?" Amy appealed to her husband.

"Certainly not, Amy — your mother's raving. She's not herself, that's all."

"Well, the man's in the hospital, isn't he? What more do you want?"

"Is he, Aubrey?"

"Do you think I'd be here, kid, if he was?"

"You wouldn't be here, only some one was fool enough to bail you out, instead of letting you stay in where you couldn't be killing people!"

"Aubrey — *are* you out on bail?" demanded Amy.

"They always bail a man in a case like this — matter of form, Amy. And they've got my car on their hands, too."

"Why didn't you bring the car back, Aubrey? Won't that fellow want it to-morrow?"

"He'll have it, all right. I'll fix that. I'm going to see them again next Monday morning at ten o'clock."

"I guess you mean you're going to see the judge for a hearing next Monday at ten o'clock!" said Mrs. Fisher shrewdly. "And pay your fine before you get away again, too."

"Did they fine you, Aubrey? Was it — was it much?"

"They didn't fine me at all!"

"No — not yet, maybe!" said Mrs. Fisher. "They'll do that on Monday."

"Time'll tell that, Mother Fisher. They didn't seem very anxious to fine me after I got through talkin' to them to-day. I guess they'd be glad to forget the whole thing, if I'd let them."

"Maybe so — after you've paid your fine Monday. You'll pay or go to jail, and it'd be just the price of you."

"I took a slam at the Pennsylvania Railroad too, while I was at it."

"Oh, you —" said Mrs. Fisher disgustedly. "You're always taking a slam at some one who's not there to slam back! That's what's leaving you under bail right now. Are you ready, Clara? Where's Joe? Joe! Amy — you comin'— ?"

"I — oh — I feel as if I were goin' to faint — I don't believe I can —" Amy faltered.

Her mother looked at her keenly.

"You stay right here!" she ordered. "Aubrey — you try to be useful, for once, and stay with her, and make her a cup of tea."

"Of course I will! And don't you worry about me, Little Mother. And don't be surprised, either, if you hear of a very quiet little shake-up very soon, in the Department of Public Safety."

"How much bail did they put you under, Aubrey?" asked Amy, in a low tone.

"One thousand berries, Amy."

"A thousand dollars!"

"That's regulation, Amy. A little chicken feed for the grafters, that is."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "Did he say they put him under a thousand dollars bail?"

"That's what I said, Mrs. Fisher — one thousand trifles. I wouldn't kid you."

"You wouldn't kid any one that had to listen to you for five minutes! And who did you get to go a thousand dollars bail for you, I'd like to know?" she asked.

"Don't be alarmed about that, either, Little

Mother. I saw that the whole affair was kept strictly within the family."

"What do you mean now — within the family?"

"Your other son-in-law was kind enough to come forward in my behalf."

"You mean Frank Hyland?"

"That's the gentleman, Mrs. Fisher — Mr. Francis X. Hyland himself."

"My God — did you hear that, Clara?"

"No — what?" asked Clara.

"He got Frank Hyland to go his bail for a thousand dollars!"

"What did you do — write him another letter?" asked Clara bitterly.

"That was not necessary, Mrs. Hyland, not giving you a short answer. Your husband, it so happened, saw the whole affair from the trolley car. He was just returning from his business and happened to be on the trolley car that ran into me!"

"How many more things ran into you beside traffic cops and trolley cars? I suppose a couple of the buildings ran into you, too, didn't they?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"You'll find out all about that Monday morning, Mother Fisher. In a judicial proceed-

ing, where a man gets a chance to be heard."

"What's the matter here?" asked Joe, coming downstairs. "Are you all ready?"

"Well, we don't want Frank Hyland losing any thousand-dollar bills on account of *you!*"

"What's happened, Mom?" asked Joe.

"Why, this crazy jack here's been running into everything in the city but ourselves, and got himself arrested, and Frank Hyland had to bail him out for a thousand dollars!"

"What were you doing, Aubrey?" asked Joe, not greatly moved. "Joy-riding?"

"No — he was trolley ridin' and traffic cop ridin' and every other kind of ridin', in an automobile that he borrowed!" said his mother.

"Here's the taxi, Mom — let's get on," said Clara.

"Too bad I left that car at the station house — I could run you down there," said Aubrey.

"You wouldn't run me down there — not if you had a thousand cars! There's enough folks in the hospital as it is! And don't you be comin' down there, either — stay here with Amy. You'd only start talkin', and that'd finish Pop quicker than another stroke."

CHAPTER IX

I

AMY sat back after the others had gone, her eyes closed, her arms stretched out along the arms of her chair. She looked very young and wan and wistful. Life was pressing hard upon her; this piling up of disaster upon disaster seemed more than she could bear. Yet as she looked up at Aubrey, after a time, strength came to her. His vitality was so inexhaustible; there was such a radiation of strength and health from him! Oh, she was lucky to have him! She knew it. She didn't care what they said about him. They were jealous. He was her man.

"You're tired, aren't you, baby?" he said, coming over to look down at her. "Just a minute now — I've got the kettle on. I'll have some tea for you pretty soon."

"No — I'll attend to that — I don't want you —"

She started to rise, but he pushed her gently down into her chair again.

"Now, now — none of that!" he said. "Think I can't get a cup of tea for you, honey? You know better than that!"

And, in fact, she did, with good reason. He was unfailingly tender and considerate with her. That was the side of him that her mother and Clara never saw. She knew it, though. How often, when she awoke not feeling quite herself, he stole out into the kitchen, so that when she came out she found breakfast ready. He never minded doing such things; he had none of the common masculine pride of ignorance about household matters. His thought was truly first for her, always.

So now, after a little while, he brought her a cup of tea, made just as she liked it, and toast, faintly browned, and buttered, and with the crusts neatly cut off. She did not want it, but she drank the tea and ate the toast to please him, and felt better, naturally, as soon as she had swallowed the tea.

He sat on the arm of her chair, and she drew his head down.

"Where's your toupé, Aubrey?" she asked.

"In my pocket, here."

"Doesn't your head hurt you, Aubrey?"

"Not a bit, honey — not a bit. There are just

a couple of little scratches — be perfectly all right in the morning."

"Aubrey — what — what do you think they'll do to you down there on Monday?"

"Now, don't you worry about that, sweetheart. I'll be right there if they try to start anything. You know me — the kid from West Philly can take care of himself."

"I was just wondering — Aubrey, you hadn't had anything to drink to-night, had you?"

"Who — me?" His surprise was genuine, and Amy's eyes showed her relief.

"I just thought — you might have met some one — he might have treated you — and even one drink — if they smell it on your breath they say things, sometimes —"

"Well, I had a glass of champagne six months ago with a friend of mine in his suite in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and I haven't had a drink of anything since then."

"I know you don't drink, Aubrey — not to call it drinking. But I just thought — you have to be so careful with the police —"

"That's the mistake so many people make, baby — letting on that because a man wears a blue uniform and a tin badge he amounts to more than the ones that pay his wages and buy

his uniform! Before I get through with those cops, they'll realize that the police have got to be careful, too."

"But — don't the judges take their word, Aubrey, when a case comes up in court?"

"The judge has to be guided by the evidence, honey. And there were plenty of witnesses who saw the way this fellow that ran into me was acting. If you ask me, he'd never tried to direct traffic before in his life. I don't believe he was a regular traffic cop at all. Don't you worry, anyway. I'll be all right."

"I'm glad Frank Hyland was there —" said Amy.

"So'm I. It saved a lot of bother."

"You'd better take your overcoat off, Aubrey. We'll have to stay here till they get back. Some one might come in — and there ought to be some one here and a light in the house when they do come back, anyway."

"Yes, sure enough. That's right, honey. It's hard lines. I wonder how your father is now?"

"Pretty bad, I guess, or they wouldn't have sent for Joe and wanted Mom to go down there. Why don't you smoke a cigar, Aubrey, if you feel like it? It would steady your nerves after that accident, maybe."

"My nerves are all right, baby — don't you worry your head about me. How about you? Feeling any better?"

"Oh, yes — I guess I was faint. I didn't eat much lunch — I just got a sandwich and a hot chocolate in a drug store. I guess that was what was the matter with me, mostly. That tea and toast was wonderful — just what I needed."

"That's good. Do you think your father's had a stroke, Amy? Your mother said he had."

"I guess that's what it was, but we don't know yet, of course. I scarcely saw Joe at all — he was the only one that had been there. But his two brothers died that way, you know, Aubrey."

"I'm mighty sorry to hear it, Amy. But you mustn't worry, now, kid. No news is always good news, anyway."

"It's not only that I'm worrying about, Aubrey. I can't help thinking about you, Monday."

"Now, listen to me, baby — you know I'd tell you, don't you, if there was anything to worry about?"

"But they're getting awfully strict in this city now, Aubrey — there've been so many automobile accidents."

"They're strict when a man's driving while

he's under the influence of liquor, honey — and they ought to be. They ought to send a man to jail who drives when he's been drinking."

"But suppose that traffic cop's hurt worse than you think, Aubrey?"

"They couldn't do any more than fine me for reckless driving, even so — because it was an accident. And they'd have to prove it *was* reckless driving before they could do that, even, and as it happens I can prove it was the cop's fault. I guess they're more likely to be apologizing to me Monday than fining me."

"Well, I wouldn't care if they only fined you, Aubrey — I could go back to work until the fine was paid."

"You'll never go back to work, kid, while I'm still on the boat. Told you that before, haven't I?"

"I wouldn't mind it, Aubrey — not if I was doing it for you. I wouldn't mind it a bit."

"Not while you're my wife, Amy. I'd rather leave the Pennsylvania Railroad flat and take one of those jobs where a man's paid something like what he's worth."

"You don't think — they couldn't do anything else to you but just fine you, could they, Aubrey?"

"Oh, I suppose they might try to take away my license."

"But you haven't *got* a license, have you?"

"No. I neglected to attend to that trifling formality this year — not expecting to buy a car till after the first of the year."

"They can fine you for that, then, can't they?"

"Driving a car without an operator's license, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Oh, sure — they can fine you for anything, unless you know how to beat them to it."

"What — what do they send drivers to — to prison for, Aubrey?"

"Oh — There's the bell — want me to answer it, Amy?"

She started up, her face white, tears in her eyes.

"No — I'll go — yes — I wish you would go, Aubrey. It might — it might be something about Pop —"

"All right, sweetness. I'll go."

II

A stooped, middle-aged man, with the patient, long-suffering look of the man who has, for year

after year, done the same thing, over and over again, was waiting on the step. He was in working clothes.

"Good evenin'," he said.

"Good evening, sir!" said Aubrey.

"Is this — is this where Mr. Fisher lives?"

"This is Mr. Fisher's residence, yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Why, I got some things of his here. The boss ast me to stop by here and leave them for him."

"Oh, just step inside, will you? Getting a little colder, I think, isn't it?"

"Well, we've got to be lookin' for that any time, now."

"Yes. Will you just step this way, please? There's a gentleman here, Amy, with some things belonging to your father. Just come right in, Governor, won't you?"

"My name's Gill. I work where Mr. Fisher does."

"This is my wife, Mrs. Piper — Mr. Fisher's daughter," said Aubrey, as Gill came into the room.

"Good evenin', ma'am. Pleased to meet you."

"Good evening, Mr. Gill. The rest of the folks are down at the hospital," said Amy.

"I see," said Gill. "Have you heard anything from there yet?"

"Not yet, no," said Amy.

"It's too bad," said Gill.

"Those hospitals won't tell you anything," said Aubrey. "We've just got to hope for the best."

"Do you work with my father?" asked Amy.

"No, ma'am. I'm a twister, on the second floor. But one of the machinist's helpers that worked with your father, he knew I lived out this way. So the boss ast me to stop. I'm on the shift that comes off work at eight o'clock — start at four o'clock in the afternoon, we do."

"I see. Thanks ever so much. What did you bring, Mr. Gill?"

"There's just his hat and overcoat and his lunch box. The boss said if he come across anything else later he'd send that out — he'd let me know, and I could bring it another time."

"Thanks ever so much. I don't imagine there'll be anything else, though."

"Well, if there is, I'll bring it, ma'am."

"Thank you," said Amy. "Were you there when my father was taken sick?"

"No, ma'am, I wasn't. I don't think there was anybody there, to tell you the truth. Mc-

Mahon says he was talkin' to him, and when he come back from the annex, just a few minutes later, he found Mr. Fisher layin' in front of his machine — Number Five machine, that was."

"Very likely a little touch of angina pectoris," said Aubrey.

"The doctor down there says he thinks it was a stroke."

"Same thing," said Aubrey.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Gill?" asked Amy.

"No, no, thank you, ma'am, I can't stay. I've got to get along out home."

There was a loud knock at the kitchen door. Amy started.

"Oh — that must be Mrs. Harbison — I'm wanted on the telephone, I guess. I'll go."

"Don't stand out there talking, Amy, with nothing around you," said Aubrey. "You live near here, Governor?"

"No, sir, I live out Richmond way."

"I see."

"I take Number Thirty-two, over Allegheny Avenue."

"Too bad my car's laid up. I could run you out there."

"Oh, that's all right, thank you, sir. The trolley takes me right by the door."

"I had to turn the car into the shop Thursday to have the valves ground."

"Aubrey — oh, Aubrey —" Amy's voice came from outside. "It *is* the telephone—Joe wants me — I'll be right back —"

"Some word from the hospital, I guess," said Aubrey.

"I hope it ain't any bad news," said Gill.

"Well, you've got to be prepared to hear most anything, Governor, when a man gets up around the old threescore mark."

"That's true, sir. A lot of them push off about that age."

"Especially when a man's worked hard all his life."

"Yes, I guess Mr. Fisher's always worked pretty hard."

"Not an excuse in the world for it, either! I've said to him a thousand times, if I've said it to him once, 'Well, Pop,' I'd say, 'when are you goin' to take the big rest?' 'Oh,' he'd say, 'I'll have lots of time to rest when I'm through.' 'All right,' I'd say, 'go ahead. Only let me tell you, Pop, you're going to get through ahead of schedule if you don't take that rest soon.'"

"Well, I guess it comes pretty hard on a man

that's been active all his life to quit all of a sudden, like."

"Well, he wouldn't have had to quit, exactly — not altogether. I mean, he's a handy man with tools and all that. He could putter around the house. There are lots of things around this place I'm not any too well satisfied with. But I don't get the time to attend to them. And you know how it is nowadays — you might just as well do little jobs around a house yourself as hire some one to do them — sort of help you get to-day you have to stand over a man while he does his work, or he does it all wrong."

"That's true, too," agreed Mr. Gill. "The young fellows ain't what they used to be. Is Mr. Fisher's wife livin'?"

"Yes, oh, yes. She's here with us, too."

"Well, that makes it nice."

"Oh, well, it's a pretty big house here, so when I married last June I said, 'Come ahead, the more the merrier.' Makes it nice for my wife while I'm away."

"'Tis a pretty big house."

"Yes, they don't build them like this any more, Governor. Put up by the McNeil people, out here in Jenkintown."

"Oh, yes."

"They just put up the twenty of them, like sample houses — ten on that side and ten on this. Of course, they're better on this side, with the southern exposure. So a man's got to do quite a bit of wire-pulling to get hold of one of them."

"Well, you've got to do some wire-pullin' to get hold of any kind of a place to live in, these days."

"You see, I've a friend who's very close to the city architect, and he was able to fix it for me."

"It's a nice street, sure enough."

"Nice in summer."

"I was surprised when I see it, because I ast a taxicab driver where it was, and he said he never heard of it."

"Never heard of Cresson Street, you mean?" asked Aubrey, surprised.

"He said not."

"He must be an awful straw ride!"

"I had to ast a police officer finally, and he knew, and told me where you was."

"Well, I'll tell you what might account for it, Governor — I don't suppose they get many calls for taxicabs out this way. You see, most everybody in through here has his own car."

"I see."

"Some of them have half a dozen, for that matter," Aubrey laughed, rather consequentially.

"You'd think people must have more than one, lots of them, from the way they keep goin'."

"All over the ice. Going, Governor? This way — thanks for coming."

"Certainly is lots of cars. Fellow was tellin' me, down to the cigar store, where I stopped to get some tobacco, that there was quite a smash-up a while ago down at Broad and Erie Avenue."

"That so?"

"Yeh. He says there was some nut down there runnin' into everything in sight. He says he even run into the traffic cop there and broke his arm for him. Can you imagine what they'll hand that guy, knockin' the traffic cop down that way?"

"What was the matter with him? Stewed?"

"I guess not — leastways, the fellow in the cigar store didn't say so. Says he's just a plain *nut*. He says they didn't know where he got hold of the car; he says it didn't belong to him. Maybe he picked it up somewhere. Anyway, they took it away from him and pinched him. So I guess he won't be runnin' into anything more for a while, anyway."

"Traffic's in pretty bad shape in this town

right now. Much as your life's worth to be out, the way some of these hicks drive," agreed Aubrey.

"Certainly is so. A man's not safe walkin' on the sidewalk these days, let alone crossin' the street. Well, I hope it'll be good news your wife's hearing."

"I hope so. Thank you very much for coming, Governor. Where do you get your car?"

"Right down at the corner here — and then I transfer."

"So you can. Thanks again."

"Don't mention it. Good night."

Aubrey walked out to the door with him. As he came back Amy came in, dully, from the kitchen.

"Back again, honey?" he said. "What's the good word?"

"Oh — oh — Aubrey — Pop's — dead —"

Gently he took her in his arms and held her close until the first paroxysm of sobbing was passed. He stroked her head tenderly.

"There, honey — there," he said. "Don't let it get you. You were a good daughter. And you've got nothing to be afraid of. The kid from West Philly'll never go back on you — you know that, don't you? Don't you, honey?"

"Wh-what, Aubrey?"

"You know I'm right with you, don't you?"

"Ye-es — oh, Aubrey — I'm so glad I've got you!"

"There, there — don't cry so, honey. The old man's better off than we are now, at that. He knows all about it now. And I guess they did everything for him down there anybody could have done."

"What do you think we ought to do, Aubrey?"

"There's nothing we can do, that I can see, honey, except just sit tight till the folks get back. That'll be pretty soon, I guess. Then we'll see."

"They said Pop never regained consciousness. I guess he didn't suffer, Aubrey — that's one thing."

"No. There's no pain in a case like that. If a man's got that sort of trouble, it's better for him to go quick, they all say, honey. Better than havin' to sit around and not be able to do anythin' at all for fear of bringing on another attack."

"Oh, Pop couldn't have stood that, I know, Aubrey! No — I guess it's better he's gone — but — oh, Pop — poor Pop —"

Aubrey wandered about the room.

"Who was it on the telephone, Amy — Joe?"

"No — Frank Hyland. Joe and Clara were with Mom — she was in an awful state, Frank said. Poor Mom —"

"That's something we ought to have in this house, Amy — a telephone of our own, and not be letting the whole neighborhood in on our business. Have to see about that a little later —"

Amy didn't listen. She was still crying, softly.

"There, honey — you want to pull yourself together before they get back. We've got your mother to think about, you know —"

"Yes — I know — but, oh, Aubrey — that chair looks so lonely, there! That's where Pop always sat, in the evenings. It's going to seem so queer, never to see him in it again — ever —"

"The old man had to go sometime, Amy — we all do. Your mother'll have you and me to comfort her, anyway."

"I don't know how she'll keep this house going, though, just on Joe's pay."

"Well, I was thinking," said Aubrey slowly, —"why don't you say something to her about

having us come in here to live? She'll need a man in the house, and my salary would help with the rent and all."

"Mom doesn't have to pay any rent, Aubrey. She owns this house. Pop left it to her, I know; he made out his will the week after we were married. Clara got him to do it."

"Who's the executor — do you know?"

"Clara."

"Too bad your father didn't name me as executor — I could have saved your mother and the estate some money."

"I suppose he was figuring on it, on account Clara's the oldest of us three."

"I wonder why he never liked me, Amy?"

"Pop never said he didn't like you, Aubrey. That's just an idea of yours —"

"Oh, I guess he didn't. You can tell. I always tried to be clubby with him — always talked to him — slapped him on the back like he was my own age."

"Pop always was very quiet, Aubrey. I can't remember when he wasn't."

"And the kid from West Philly always had too much to say, eh? Well, forgive and forget. It's all over now. And the old man can be as quiet as he likes."

Amy sobbed again. Then she roused herself.

"Did you get your dinner downtown, Aubrey? I can get you something as easy as not if you didn't —"

"Oh, I had something down at Childs'. It'll be all the same if I hadn't though — all the same at the finish. Wouldn't matter whether I'd had my dinner or not. *'Sic transit gloria mundi!'* And that's what we never can get used to. The paths of glory lead but to the grave. And yet we go on, building up big fortunes, only to leave them to the generations yet unborn to dissipate. So it goes. And so it always will go, I suppose, whether or no. *'Sic transit gloria mundi'*."

"What does that mean, Aubrey —*'sic transit gloria mundi'*?"

"Oh, that? That's an old saying from the French — meaning, 'We're here to-day and gone to-morrow.'"

"Oh, I didn't know. Aubrey — I can't help worrying about to-morrow —" said Amy wretchedly.

"To-morrow, sweetheart?"

"I mean Monday — and you goin' to court and everything —"

"Now, now — sufficient to the day is the

evil thereof — you know that, don't you, baby?"

"But you didn't have a license, Aubrey, and if that traffic cop was badly hurt —"

"Don't you worry about that another minute, sweetheart. He wasn't. We're here to-day — who knows what'll happen by next Monday? We'll know all about it then. Keep up a stiff upper lip — I think I hear some one coming."

CHAPTER X

I

TO the Fisher household death had come as mercifully, as simply, as death ever can come. Mr. Fisher had long anticipated his end; he had done everything his circumstances permitted him, as a prudent man, to do to soften the blow for those he left behind. He had made a will, as Amy had told her husband; he had done so, to be sure, almost at Clara's dictation, but he had not, at least, refused in superstitious fear, to do so, as many men of his upbringing do.

He had carried for a long time, moreover, a thousand-dollar insurance policy in one of the industrial companies, whose collector came around once a week for the tiny premium and had never failed to obtain it. He had never been in debt; the settlement of the estate promised to be a simple and inexpensive matter. There was the house; that had stood in his name. There was some money in a savings bank; most of it had been in joint account with Mrs. Fisher.

So it was that Mrs. Fisher had no need to fear immediate disaster on account of the sudden cessation of his weekly pay. The company was unusually kind; it sent her, the day after the funeral, a check that represented not only Mr. Fisher's wages up to the hour when he was stricken, which was all she might have expected from a good many employers, but to the end of the current month. There were death benefits, too, from a lodge. So there was more than enough to pay the undertaker, and a fair amount of cash beside. A lot in a cemetery had been bought long before, and a stone set up, all ready to have the names cut into it when the time should come.

The future demanded thought, and Mrs. Fisher, long grown used to calculation, saw nothing wrong in talking to Clara about it even before the funeral.

"I guess Joe and me can make out on what he gets," she said. "He's a good boy, and he'll want the home kept up. I s'pose I could come and live with you —"

"You'd be welcome, Mom, but I don't believe you'd like it," said Clara.

"No, an' I know I wouldn't. You're a good girl and a good housekeeper, too, Clara, but I'm

too set in my ways. And I'm no great believer in married folks livin' with any one else, any way you look at it, when it's not necessary. Joe and I'll get along. He don't make so much — I wish now I'd wrestled with him harder about givin' up his other job."

"Joe's all right, Mom. He's bright. He's going to get somewhere. Do you know — I believe he's going to make a lot of money out of that invention of his before we hear the end of it."

"Oh, go on with your inventions, Clara! You're as bad as Aubrey Piper with your dreamin'. Joe's a good, steady boy, but he's not the sort to make a lot of money, any more than his Pop was. He spends too much time dreamin'. You're all alike, that way, though I will say you have more sense than the other two of them."

"Well, we'll see, Mom. I want you to be happy and comfortable. That's what Frank was saying, too, just this morning. We'd love to have you come in with us, if you'd like it, but he says —"

"I'm goin' to stay right here, Clara. This is my home that I slaved and worked to get, and I've lived in it a long time, and I'm aimin' to be buried from it, like your Pop's going to be."

"Well, I see how you feel, Mom. I'll have a talk with Joe, too, and see what he thinks about it."

"That's right. He's the man of the family now, and he ought to be consulted. Not that I'm saying a word against Frank Hyland, mind you, Clara. He's been like a son with me. You've got a fine man, Clara."

Mrs. Fisher didn't see, she never had seen, the faint contraction of Clara's brows when things like that were said to her. It simply didn't occur to Mrs. Fisher that it was within the bounds of possibility that Clara should be anything but happy and content in her marriage. Frank was quiet, sure enough, but Clara was getting on, too, now, and she'd always been a steady, sensible girl, and not one given to gadding about.

"Joe'll be wanting to get married, one of these days, Mom — you want to remember that," said Clara.

"Small chance of that, the way he does! When's he ever give himself a chance to meet a girl?" said Mrs. Fisher.

"He'll meet one, all right, sooner or later — they always do," said Clara. "When he does, I guess he won't talk her to death, anyway."

"No. He won't be like that blowhard of Amy's."

"Oh, well, Aubrey might be worse, Mom. He's steady — he doesn't drink or run around with other women —"

"Good reason why — he's not got the money."

"Oh, that's not the only reason, Mom. He wouldn't, anyway. He loves Amy. And that's more than a lot of women get from their husbands after they've been married a while."

"Well, I guess they can do without it, if they've not got other things to worry them."

"I suppose they can, Mom. They have to, anyway," said Clara, without spirit.

"He'll come to no good end, mark my words, that fellow of Amy's. He'll get caught up with some day, for all his talkin'. How about this trial? What do you think they'll do to him, Clara?"

"Frank says they'll fine him, and try to scare him a bit. Frank don't seem to think it was so bad, what he did — says it might have happened to any one that wasn't used to driving in the city."

"I suppose you'll be takin' his side next!" said Mrs. Fisher.

"No, but, Mom, don't you think maybe we're

too ready to jump on him? I know he's a pest, and he talks too much, and he's forever showing off. But we do get sore at him, whatever happens — things we wouldn't think anything about with any one else."

"All right — all right — have it your own way. Only don't talk to me about him. I've got plenty more to think about than him and the way he acts."

So, for that matter, had Clara. Between her and her husband, she was beginning to feel, things could not go on much longer as they were doing. It seemed to her that their life now was as unfair to him as to her. What she was seeing was the effect of the strain under which Frank Hyland had been living ever since his meeting with Gertrude.

Clara's mind was slow, but it was good. It received new impressions reluctantly; she vastly preferred, as did her mother, to ignore unpleasant facts. But it was an honest mind as well as a slow one; Clara would never temporize, once she was convinced that a situation called for action.

She had been almost incredibly slow to harbor suspicions of a definite character about Frank. She knew women who lived in a state of constant

watchfulness; who assumed that their husbands were always in search of an opportunity to deceive them; who prided themselves upon their skill and cunning in outwitting them. One of them, Clara felt, represented the underlying feeling they all had. That was Minnie Rogers.

"Any time my husband gets to playing around with another woman, it's my fault," Minnie said. "They'll all do it, if you give them a chance. I s'pose it's more exciting. Well — Jim doesn't get the chance, I'll tell you. If he's got any money to spend on a woman, he can spend it on me. It he's got time to take any girl downtown to dinner and to a show, he can take me."

Clara, in the beginning, had sprung to the defense of men, as a sex; she had cited Frank's behavior as an example. But she had been laughed at so much, for her pains, that she no longer did that. And, insensibly, she was affected by the constant talk she heard.

If men were tired and absent-minded when they were at home, there was a reason. If they were always having to go out at night — again there was a reason. If they weren't jealous themselves, if they didn't seem to care where their wives were or what they did, that was the worst sign of all. Men weren't that way, ever,

unless they had something to conceal themselves.

"If they're afraid to start anything — look out!" said Minnie Rogers. "Then it's liable to be serious. Most of the time it isn't. And the quieter they are, the more you want to look out."

Yet Clara, although she was beginning to worry, was quite unable to see what she might do. She would not stoop to the tactics Minnie and the rest pursued so successfully. Nor could she seek advice. Her mother, she knew, would laugh at her. Something was wrong; of that she was certain. And she was certain, too, that Frank was suffering, in his way, as much as she. But she could only grope, slowly and lamely, toward a solution of her problem.

II

In her conviction that Frank, too, was suffering, Clara was right. He, too, had the feeling that a crisis of some sort was approaching. He was realizing what countless men and women have had to realize, what men and women caught in the mesh of such a situation always do have to realize, that it isn't possible to mark time in-

definitely. Between him and Gertrude there was a growing tension.

She was, it seemed, finding life with her husband more and more difficult, more nearly insupportable. Each time, now, when Frank saw her, she had new reports of his brutality, his complete indifference, his shameless flaunting of his love affairs. Her position was rapidly becoming an impossible one, she said. So long as her husband had maintained some pretense, so long as every one had not known of his conduct, she had been able to pretend to ignore it. But that, she told Frank, she could no longer do.

"I think he wants me to divorce him, now," she said, finally. That was when, most inopportunely, she had come to Philadelphia on the very day of Mr. Fisher's death. It was from a rendezvous with her that Frank was returning when he encountered Aubrey Piper and went to his rescue.

Frank had made no response to that remark. He was thinking rather desperately.

"I think he wants to marry this girl he's running around with now," Gertrude went on. "She's not like the others he's been mad about. Her folks are nice people, and she's always seemed to be all right. Maybe she's holding him

off, and he's old enough to make a fool of himself now. Beside — well, people don't get as excited about divorce as they used to."

"Some people still do," said Frank. "I suppose it's all right, if there's no other way out. But —"

She looked at him sharply.

"Suppose I did divorce him?" she said.

"He'd have to give you money enough to live on, wouldn't he?" asked Frank.

"Oh, yes! But — that's not what I'm thinking about. What would you do?"

"I — don't know," Frank said, honestly — and never saw at all the flash of anger in her eyes. "I don't see what I could do."

"Would Clara — would your wife divorce you?"

"I don't know," he said, again.

"You'd want her to, wouldn't you, Frank? You do love me still, don't you?"

"Yes," he said, slowly. "But that's not the only thing I'd have to think about, Gertrude. It'd be pretty hard on Clara."

"It's pretty hard on her now," said Gertrude, with a hard laugh. "Oh, don't fool yourself, Frank! She may not know about us — but she knows there's something. A woman always does.

And if she keeps quiet and never says a word, it's usually a sign that she's having a worse time than if she went on and nagged the life out of you. Or else that she's clever."

"Clara's not clever — not the way you mean — not the way you are," said Frank.

"Well, then — that's just what I mean! Frank, let me tell you — the way things are, we're all three of us miserable. Two of us might be happy. Isn't that better than having us all wretched? And it's fairer to her too, really. She's young, yet — younger than you and I. She might meet some one else. I've seen that happen lots of times."

Frank shook his head.

"You don't know Clara," he said. "She's not like the people you know, Gertrude. I don't know what to do. I've got to think about things and see what's best to do."

Gertrude eyed him sharply; started to say something more; then stopped, biting her lips. She had told Frank a good deal, but, characteristically, she had suppressed the really significant things she might have told him. She had done that from the beginning.

It was true enough that her husband had had more than one affair with other women. But it

was also true that her own behavior had had much to do with his course. She had never loved him, and he had, in the beginning, been truly in love with her. And of that, naturally enough, she never told Frank Hyland at all. Just so, she did not tell him that her husband had, of late, altered his bearing; that he had warned her, in effect, that his patience was exhausted. Gertrude knew, better than any one else, what damaging evidence against her might be discovered should a real effort be made; she was, really, in a panic when she first spoke to Frank of the possibility of divorce. He had become, suddenly, her sheet anchor; she saw herself drifting toward disaster, with him as her only hope of ultimate recovery.

But Frank had never, until that day, so much as thought of divorce. His whole instinct and training, his whole habit of thought, had prevented him from doing so. Marriage, as he saw it, was a thing to be seen through. His mind was essentially fair; it leaped at once, when Gertrude began to talk of the future, to Clara. None of this was her fault. She had not come between him and Gertrude; she had never even known of Gertrude's existence. It would be monstrously unfair to make her suffer; to trans-

fer to her the burden of the mistakes that he and Gertrude had made.

Yet he was under the spell of Gertrude. He was desperately sorry for her. He saw her still as the young girl who had been swept into a desperate and hopeless adventure by considerations understandable and reasonable enough. Her hardness, her selfishness, the superficial quality of her mind, had never been revealed to him. She remained, too, the woman who had first roused and moved him emotionally. And more than that, she held for him, as a woman, the mysterious quality of the unattained goal. He put it simply enough to himself: he loved her.

Throughout the whole period of his clandestine meetings with her he had avoided, however, any direct comparison between her and Clara, and, equally, any frank and honest examination of his feelings about Clara. He had taken certain things for granted. He had assumed that, since he was married to Clara, he would stay married to her. And what Gertrude had said forced him to the realization that that did not follow as a matter of course; that other possibilities, after all, had to be considered.

Suppose Clara were unhappy? Suppose she should prefer to be free; free to make an effort

to find more from life than he had been able to give her? After all — why shouldn't she? She was young; she was beautiful. More beautiful, he found himself thinking, than Gertrude. More beautiful, certainly, than she had been when they were married. Some other man —

The thought startled him, disturbed him, vaguely angered him. Queer instincts asserted themselves. She was his. She belonged to him. At the assault upon his possessive feeling, even though it was made only in his own thoughts, by himself, he was aroused, faintly indignant, in the most curious way alarmed. The extraordinary unfairness and complexity of life struck him, all at once. He ought to welcome such a thought. But he did not. Clara . . . his wife. . . .

Inevitably, his mind being what it was, Frank turned to a reëxamination, a revaluation, of his whole feeling for Gertrude. Just how genuine had that old, long-standing grief of his for her defection been? How much of its significance had been due to a sense of loss, how much to injured pride? He had literally never thought of that before. But wasn't it a thing one had to think about?

He turned back, too, to the emotions he had experienced on the occasion of his meeting with

her that day in Philadelphia. He had been surprised. But had he, until she gave him, perhaps unconsciously, the lead, regarded her as a woman to be desired? It seemed to him now that he had not; that he had considered the fact that they were both married as a barrier so fixed and firm that there could be no thought, even, of surmounting it. How, then, had he come to the point where he now stood, with the barrier all but down?

He had not, he was beginning to realize, taken the various, the many, steps that had led him so far wholly of his own volition. It had been, always, something in Gertrude's manner, when they met again, that led him to the realization of the progress they had made. He could, so far as she was concerned, have left things as they were. It had been she who had seen the impossibility of that — an impossibility, however, that he recognized now as clearly as she.

They faced a choice; so much was clear. They had to go on or withdraw. They couldn't, as he had, for a long time, imagined they could, go on being content with occasional meetings, hurried, nervous, public. But then, Clara . . . ? He had to contemplate, for the first time, telling Clara everything; coming to a frank and full settle-

ment with her. Not yet, however. He came, in his thinking, to the heart of the business at last. What did he himself want to do? He realized himself the profound significance of the answer he was obliged to make to that question. He did not know.

III

Joe Fisher was less affected by his father's death, in any obvious way, than any one in the family. Not because he had not been fond of his father; there had, as a matter of fact, been an altogether unusual degree of sympathy and understanding between them. But Joe possessed a clearness of vision not always given to men a great deal older and more experienced than himself; his first reaction to the shock of the news about Mr. Fisher's stroke was a realization that new responsibilities were now sure to be thrust upon him.

Of his ability to care for his mother, and, if necessary, for Amy as well, Joe entertained no doubt. But he was engaged, at the time, in negotiations so promising that they almost scared him. And he feared the effect of the emotional disturbance of his father's death. His mother was not young; she had struggled so hard and

so long that it was not unlikely that a shock might have serious effects. Joe wanted, above all things, to maintain peace and quiet and custom in the house for the time; he felt that his whole future depended upon the outcome of the negotiations he had, some weeks before, begun with regard to his formula for preventing rust in iron and steel.

If they failed, if he had made some mistake, or if he were unable to convince the people with whom he was dealing that the formula was sound, he could, he feared, bid farewell, for years, if not altogether, to any hope of escaping from the treadmill that had held his father all his working life. If he had to turn in and run the house upon his wages, he would have mighty little time to do research work and to exploit any discoveries he might make.

Of late, although his mother had not known it, Joe had worked only one or two days a week. He had been at the beck and call of Meyers and Stevens, the great firm that had taken his formula under consideration. There had been conferences and experimental sessions without number. He had met plenty of discouragement and even more delay. He had had, at first, to deal with subordinates, and he had not been experi-

enced enough to realize that they were subordinates; men whose function is was, after all, simply to extract facts from him and report to their chiefs. They had acted as if they were themselves the important men; only when he had convinced them did he discover that there remained others to be persuaded.

It was simply because he had to talk to some one that Joe, a day or two after his father's death, while the house was still under the pall of that formidable event, told Aubrey how things were going.

"Meyers and Stevens, eh?" said Aubrey. "Didn't I always say to give the growing boy a chance? Make them sign on the dotted line, Joe! Don't give them an inch."

"I'm not going to. But it's awful slow work, Aubrey."

"Rome wasn't built in a day — never forget that, Joe. How far have you gone with them?"

"Well, that's just what I never can quite figure out, Aubrey. That's just what keeps me guessing. One day I think we're all ready to sign up, and then they tell me they've got to look over the files down in Washington some more to make sure there's no infringement."

"You've patented your formula?"

"No. What's the use of that? I'm holding out on them, though. Given them ingredients, but not exact proportions. And I'm keeping the method of use to myself, too — part of it. There's a catch there. But they can check up — they've had time enough to do it, too."

"Have to deal with them, do you? Good idea to make them think other people are after it, too."

"I know. But look how I'm fixed, Aubrey. I've got to get quick action on this. Once I start in running the house here — well, you can figure out for yourself how much time I'll have to run around then. No — I want to put this over now."

"Don't let any consideration like that tie you up, Joe. Not while the old kid from West Philly's one of the family! I'll take over the entire responsibility of this house — glad to do it, Joe! I know the general line you've been following, and I'm here to say you're on the right track. I've gone into that phase of industrial chemistry very thoroughly — very thoroughly indeed. I'll back you to the limit —"

Joe laughed for the first time since he had gone to the hospital after his father's stroke.

"Well, that's mighty good of you, Aubrey," he

said, "but I guess we can manage. The way it looks now they mean to go through with the deal, all right. I'd rather have them than any one else — they've got the organization, and they've got the right sort of contact with the market we want to develop. Anything they stand behind is bound to go over —"

"H'm! That's a consideration — and you're right — they're good people. Better let me see any contract before you sign it, Joe. They might try to slip something over on you."

"I guess trying's as far as they'd get. I've got a lawyer to see to all that."

Aubrey nodded.

"That's right — wisest thing to do," he said. "A good lawyer saves you more than you have to pay him. I've always said that. Who did you get?"

"Mr. Farley — James K. Farley."

"Got an office in the North American Building?"

"That's the one. Do you know him, Aubrey?"

"I know of him — friends of mine are clients of his. He's all right. Oh, he'll bear watching, like any lawyer, but he's about as good as any of them."

"He's mighty keen, seems to me," said Joe.

"He just laughed at them when they began talking about buying the formula outright."

"Oh, they'd do that! That's what they tried to put over on me. Not your people — some others. I walked out on them."

"Now they're talking royalty."

"That's the said and done. What royalty are you asking for?"

"Farley put it up to them to make a proposition. Way he talks, I should say about twenty-five per cent."

"Too little, Joe. Hold out for a bigger split than that. That's on the gross sales?"

"No — on net profits."

"Then it's much too little."

"But if this thing comes off at all, Aubrey, there's millions in it —"

"Yes — and you want to get your share of them! Your brain created this thing, didn't it? Listen to me, Joe — I'm older than you, and I know the way these capitalists work. A working man doesn't get a chance to make 'em sign on the dotted line every day — but if they want this formula of yours at all, they'll want it so badly that they'll pay through the nose for it. You've got to ride 'em, once you get the spurs on. By Jove, I've half a mind to —"

"What?"

"Nothing — never mind. But you make that lawyer talk to them, Joe. Make them walk the plank — you'll never have a better chance than you've got this minute."

"I guess that's about the way he feels, too, Aubrey. He handles a lot of patent business. He knows about what you can get for a thing like this."

"That's all right, too. I'm not saying a word against him, either — but you want to remember that lawyers have worked for the other side before this. You let me see those contracts before you sign them, Joe — remember."

"I won't forget," said Joe. "You're certainly a cheerful one to have around, Aubrey!"

"I try to keep up my end," said Aubrey. "One for all — all for one; that's my motto. And blood's thicker than watered stock, any day in the week. Of course, a little later, I could finance this thing for you, and we could keep the whole thing in the family — buy up a plant and manufacture your compound ourselves. Time enough for that, though — the thing to do now is to spoil the Egyptians. You'll have something more when I'm ready to back it. You're not the

sort to lie back and live on one success — not if I know you."

"I haven't got the one success yet," Joe reminded him. "Well — I'm much obliged, Aubrey. You've helped me a lot."

"Glad to oblige — any time I can do anything for you, just let me know. And don't worry if they refuse to come through. I can organize a syndicate to handle this proposition overnight, if it comes to that."

"I'll remember that, if they throw me down!" said Joe.

He was vastly cheered. Had he really needed or wanted advice Joe would have chosen a confidant at random from the city directory rather than seek it from Aubrey. But Aubrey had done for him what he had been unable to do for himself — snapped the tension that had made the last few days almost unbearable.

IV

Joe came nearer, perhaps, really to knowing Aubrey Piper than any one in the family — always excepting Amy. Mrs. Fisher positively and actively disliked him, as had her husband. Clara did not so much dislike him as find him

wearing to her nerves, which were being drawn tighter day after day by the uncertainty in which she lived with regard to her marriage.

But Joe possessed, in a greater degree than any of the Fishers, the quality of tolerance. Only a few things seemed to Joe to be really significant and important; about the rest he could not get excited, whether they went well or ill. The vital thing in a marriage, Joe thought, was love. His thinking about love was abstract, remote, idealistic. So far, no girl had touched him. His development had been curiously uneven. His mind was, in many respects, fully mature. In others it was adolescent.

He was devoted to both his sisters. As he saw it, Amy was happy in her marriage; Clara was not, for reasons which puzzled and disturbed him. Aubrey made Amy happy; that was more than Frank Hyland, for all he was so much more admirable from most points of view, had been able to do for Clara. All right, then; so Joe's mind ran. There was that much good about Aubrey. So long as he suited Amy, it mattered very little what other people thought of him. He didn't make much money; granted. But he worked hard; he did his best, even if that best were pretty poor.

Joe was going to make money; more money than any of the Fishers had ever dreamed of making. He was going to be rich. Soon, he thought; eventually, anyway. All right. He'd take care of Amy. He'd see Aubrey through, if he couldn't swing things alone. Why not? Joe's reasoning was profoundly simple. It was direct. It satisfied him. If it was based on assumptions more far-reaching than he knew, still its very simplicity redeemed it, provided it with hidden values. Fundamentally, he believed this about Aubrey: that you could, in all essential ways, trust him.

His mother would have laughed at the idea. That was precisely what she never had done. How, she would have asked Joe, could you trust a man who lied every other time he opened his mouth — lied about his position, his prospects, his behavior in connection with the most trifling things? Joe knew all that. And cared less than nothing for his knowledge. He really did get at the heart of Aubrey's romancing — the man's essential kinship to the story-tellers, the actors, of all time. What harm did such lying as Aubrey's do? That was what Joe wanted to know. So far as he could see — none.

Yet Joe would have been deeply disturbed and

alarmed had he known what Aubrey, upon the very heels of that talk of theirs, proceeded to do. He understood Aubrey — but he did not probe quite deeply enough. He never came fully to understand that Aubrey, as a matter of fact, never lied at all, in any real sense of the word. He had, simply, an astonishing histrionic gift; an altogether unusual ability to project his personality into another plane.

What Aubrey did was to call, the next day, upon Farley, Joe's lawyer. His manner was such as to impress an office boy; the lawyer, impressed in his turn by the mention of Joe's name, saw him without delay. A big man, Farley, in more ways than one; big of frame, big in reputation, adequate, and more, in mentality.

"You wanted to see me about young Joe Fisher — ?"

"Yes, sir! He's my brother-in-law — and, as you know, no more than a boy. A brilliant boy, but, after all, with a boy's mind and a boy's impulsiveness."

"You don't say so!" said Farley, rather dryly. "Well — he didn't strike me as either boyish or impulsive when we were discussing terms. My usual practice, when I have to accept a contingent fee, is to charge ten per cent.

of my client's gains. But Joe held out for five per cent.— said there was no risk. And, by Jove, he made me believe him!"

Aubrey's laugh rang out.

"We had you there, brother Farley — we certainly had you there!" he said. "Signed on the dotted line, didn't you? I'm afraid you can charge that extra five per cent. to me! I told him — told him the growing boy had to have his chance. That's the said and done, brother Farley — that's the said and done."

"Well!" said the lawyer. "No hard feelings — I expect to make a pretty fat fee, even at five per cent. instead of ten."

"You will — and we won't grudge you a penny of it, either. That's just what I want to talk to you about, though. In a way, I suppose, I stand *in loco parentis* to Joe, since his father's dead — being the head of the house, as it were."

"You're married to Joe's sister — which one?"

"The younger — Amy — Mrs. Aubrey Piper. Of course, old Frank Hyland doesn't count, in a deal like this. He lacks vision. A good man — a fine fellow — one of my best friends. But he's got no part in a deal of this magnitude. Now, I —"

"Exactly. What can I do for you, Mr. Piper? You understand, I suppose, that this deal is practically closed — ?"

"No deal's ever closed until the papers are signed, sealed and delivered, brother Farley — you know that, as a lawyer! And I don't mind telling you that you'll find it hard to get Joe's John Hancock till I've given the agreement the once over."

"I see. Are you familiar with the agreement as it has been tentatively drawn?"

"I am, yes — but I should like to confirm my understanding by hearing your statement of it."

"It's extremely simple. A twenty-five per cent. royalty — based upon net profits. Fifty thousand dollars, advance against royalty, to be paid in cash when the agreement is signed. Meyers and Stevens estimate that the net profits should be at least two million dollars in the first five years."

"Half a million for Joe — three times that for them?"

"Remember, they take all the risk."

"There's no risk. I'm fully familiar with the proposition, Mr. Farley, remember. I can't advise Joe to agree to such terms as that. Double

the advance — double the royalty — then we might listen."

Farley threw up his hands.

"Good Lord, man!" he said. "These people are backing and filling as it is. They held out for an outright sale. Then they offered a five per cent. royalty — and I can imagine worse offers, at that! Try to jack them up now, and you'll get the whole deal called off. These aren't the sort of people to be held up."

"That's where you're wrong, Counselor," said Aubrey, superbly. "The bigger they are the more exactly they're the ones you've got to handle just that way! If this were some little cheap outfit, you'd be right — assuming it represented Joe's only chance. But who are the men it's easiest to bleed? The biggest! Look at Andrew Carnegie and that trust company he lent millions to without security, just because they'd been clever enough to give it his name! Remember — ?"

"I do — and I remember some of them went to jail, too," said Farley grimly.

"But not for that part of the deal. Mistake they made was in not keeping on! No, sir — we've got a good thing in this rust formula, and we're not giving it away. You might be able to

persuade Joe, but, as for me, I'm willing to take a chance. And I know we can make them meet us, what's more."

Farley sighed.

"If you speak for Joe, I've nothing more to say," he said. "I shall advise him according to my own judgment. But he's the one to make the final decision, Mr. Piper — neither you nor I."

"That's understood. I just wanted to let you know how we felt. Joe's not a business man, Counselor, as you know. If I weren't behind him, he'd accept any offer that was made. Mind you, I'm not criticizing you — you're a busy man, and it's your duty to play safe. But we don't have to close this deal at once. I'm right behind Joe — I'll back him to the limit of my resources. He's one man who won't have to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage — not while Aubrey Piper's got a dollar in the bank!"

"He is fortunate," said Farley, rising. "I'm sorry I can't agree with you — and that I don't feel justified in approaching Meyers and Stevens with any proposal to modify the tentative terms agreed upon. If Joe wants to do so himself I can't stop him, of course. But I disapprove — I say that as emphatically as possible."

"That's straight talk — it's the sort I like to hear. We'll never quarrel over anything like that, Mr. Farley. In fact — it's possible that I may be coming in here to consult you myself, one of these days. I've some ticklish matters coming to a head —"

"Glad to see you, any time," said Farley. "Good day, sir."

"Thinks he's got me bluffed!" said Aubrey, when he was alone and on his way down in the elevator. "H'm. Strike while the iron's hot!"

He fumbled in his pockets, when he was in the street. In a matter involving millions, like this, one ought to take a taxi. But all he had was lunch money. He took a street car; walked a block, after he had left the car, to the office of Meyers and Stevens. Again, he was impressive. An office boy, a junior clerk, a confidential secretary, each in his turn, succumbed to carnation, cane, stylish topcoat, toupé. Aubrey found himself in the office of Mr. Meyers.

"You're here in behalf of Mr. Fisher? Yes — I see. We heard of his bereavement — too bad. Just on the eve of his triumph, so to speak. We've reached our decision, you'll be glad to hear. I'm dictating a letter this afternoon —"

"Just a minute — just a minute!" said Au-

brey. "We're not quite ready to sign on the dotted line yet, Mr. Meyers! You understand — I've had no official standing in this matter until just lately — since Mr. Fisher's death. A fine man, my father-in-law, but lacking, perhaps, in the larger vision! Now, as my brother-in-law's guardian — as the head of the family —"

There came a marked contraction of the other's eyebrows.

"I have had no intimation of anything of this sort —"

"The boy is not of age, Mr. Meyers. I am bound to see to it that he does not compromise his interests —"

"But Mr. Farley —"

That was a false step, and Aubrey pounced upon the clew.

"You've heard from him, then? This morning?"

Meyers hesitated. But he was caught; he knew it; there was, too, something vastly impressive about Aubrey just then.

"We'll understand one another, Mr. Meyers," he said. "The boy has brought you something of immense — of incalculable value. You are fair people here — if I didn't know that, I'd call off the whole deal. You want to get off as

cheaply as you can — I don't hold that against you. You've had dealings with Farley before — he considers you, naturally, more important than this boy. You and he have made a very pleasant arrangement — fair enough to Fisher, from one angle — a little more than fair to you. Suppose we talk real business."

"I don't follow you —"

"My dear sir! As one business man to another — I've done these things myself. I've had to put the interests of my company, the Pennsylvania Railroad, before abstract considerations more than once — so has every executive. In this instance you have to deal with me, not with a visionary boy, without a full realization of his own achievement. I told Farley our terms. I'll repeat them to you. One hundred thousand dollars advance, against a fifty per cent. division of the net profits."

"Preposterous! And you do Farley a grave injustice. He has brought us to the point of being willing to offer unusually generous terms — such as not one inventor in a thousand secures —"

"But not one invention in a million has the merit of this one. Let's put our cards down on the table. Those are our terms. Take them or

leave them — I don't care which you do! I told Farley — I'll tell you. I'm behind my brother-in-law. Every penny I have is at his disposal. It would interfere with other enterprises of mine, but rather than see him give this formula away I would organize a company and exploit it myself!"

Meyers smiled.

"I'm afraid you would find that an expensive proposition. Our facilities — our relations with the great users of structural iron and steel —"

"I know all that! But they'll come to the man who controls the Fisher formula — and you know it. Think it over — don't decide now. Take your time — we don't want to press you. But when you send that letter — remember what I've said."

He took his hat.

"I've no doubt of your decision — none whatever," he said. "Good day, Mr. Meyers."

CHAPTER XI

I

IN the press of great affairs, of deals that ran into the millions, Aubrey gave no thought to certain minor, yet in a way more pressing, matters. He was, after all, under one thousand dollars' bail. And the city, aroused against the mounting toll of automobile accidents, had concerned itself, to a certain extent, with him. There had been brief editorials in the newspapers, citing the accident at Broad and Erie Avenue as an example, that might well have been a tragic one, of the dangers inherent in the uncontrolled traffic of the town. Severity was urged in dealing with such offenders; how had it been possible for an unlicensed driver, wholly incapable of handling a machine in even the most trifling of emergencies, to endanger life and limb on one of the city's main arteries?

Amy was deeply concerned and worried. She took no comfort, for once, in Aubrey's scornful brushing aside of the sinister possibilities of the situation. They might send him to prison. She

believed in him; believed that the traffic officer had given the wrong signal. But she was afraid of the outcome. They would believe the officer, rather than Aubrey; that was certain.

"Well, it's time some one stood up to them!" said Aubrey. "And the kid from West Philly's the one to do it if he has to! I'll not knuckle down to any lot of grafting cops. They know they can't bluff me — that's the said and done. If I'd go around and make a deal with them this whole thing'd be wiped off the books. But I'm out for a show-down. And before I'm done the papers'll have a mighty different song to sing, I can tell you!"

There was nothing to do but wait; Amy saw that. Wait and try to solve the problem of the immediate future. They had to move soon. She wanted, desperately, to come home; to be with her mother. But how could she ask that? The things her mother and Clara had said rankled in her mind. And she remembered what she herself had said in answer. Aubrey didn't know all that. She couldn't tell him. He saw no reason why they shouldn't take up their quarters at once with Mrs. Fisher. There was plenty of room; it was the obvious thing to do.

Day followed day, and Amy saw no lightening

of the clouds that filled her far horizons. Yet her faith in Aubrey never wavered at all, and, no matter how gloomy and downcast she was, the very sight of him cheered her. She knew nothing of Joe's affairs; Aubrey, for once, perhaps because he had something real to talk about, refrained from boasting and predicting.

Amy knew nothing, so, of Aubrey's interviews with Farley and Meyers. But Joe knew — and assailed Aubrey furiously with his knowledge. He knew because there came to him, the day after Aubrey had called on Meyers, not the cordial letter agreeing to the old terms that Meyers had dictated before Aubrey's appearance, but a curt, formal note, signed only by a secretary.

"Mr. Meyers asks me to inform you," it ran, "that in view of the position taken by Mr. Piper, it has been decided to proceed no further with negotiations concerning your formula."

Joe, amazed and furious, called up Farley first; the lawyer was out of town; he was in Washington on business and might not be back for several days. Straight, then, went Joe to Aubrey. And Aubrey, reading the note, broke into his wildest, loudest laughter.

"Sign on the dotted line!" he cried. "You've got them, Joe — the harpoon's taken hold!

That's their last rush — trying to bluff you! Don't notice them. They're sitting around there now, waiting. Listening for the telephone. Waiting for you to turn up. Looking for the mail. Let them wait!"

"You listen to me, now, Aubrey," said Joe. "I'm going down there first thing to-morrow morning and tell them all about you — what a no-account, four-flushing show-off you are. And if you ever butt into my affairs again —"

"Have it your own way, Joe," said Aubrey. Not for a moment did he lose his temper. "You'll hand them a million dollars on a silver platter if you do — and the Lord knows how much more beside! Can't you see their game? Farley's in Washington — mighty convenient time for him to be away, seems to me!

"You're taking this just the way they figured you would. You've let them scare you. You'll come down the first time the dog barks. Wait, Joe. Take it easy. Suppose you don't pay any attention to the letter Meyers sent you? What'll happen?"

"I'll lose the whole thing — that's what'll happen —"

"Why will you? Suppose they'd have offered what they did if they hadn't known how good it

was — if they hadn't known they had to have it? Stop and think — be yourself, Joe, be yourself. Fifty thousand's chicken feed for what you're selling, but it's a lot of money. Men like Meyers and Stevens don't go around handing out fifty thousand dollars right and left. Now — suppose you wait — here's what'll happen. Farley'll come back. He'll hear about it. And he'll be called in to patch things up."

"They're sore, Aubrey. You can see that from the way they wrote in that letter —"

"Sure — that's what they want you to think, Joe. I've found that business men don't get sore — not that way. Or if they do, they get over it when it's dollars in their pockets to do it. Joe — you wait! Wait till Monday morning, anyway — Farley'll be back by then. Do that much — you can't lose anything waiting that long. And I'll bet you anything you like you'll get word from them by then!"

"Well —" Joe hesitated. "All right — I'll wait till Monday," he said reluctantly. "But if this thing falls through — !"

"If it does I'll organize a company and back you myself — I'm not sure this isn't exactly the chance I've been waiting for —"

"Oh, you!" Such talk amused Joe, as a rule.

But not now. Aubrey had his nerve. Good thing Mom didn't know about this, though. She was down on him enough as it was.

Joe wanted his mother to take Amy and Aubrey in with her. They'd been staying on, since Mr. Fisher's death. It seemed a good arrangement. Joe had plans and visions of his own — if this thing came off. He couldn't be around the house all the time. And there ought to be some one. Mom wasn't so young, any more. He and Clara had talked over the whole situation, and Clara agreed with him, now, though there'd been a time when she had been set against anything of the sort.

II

Monday came, as all days long awaited do. It was a gray day, a day of a misting rain, fine, persistent, permeating everything. It was a day to try the nerves; a day capable, in itself, even though it had not been freighted with a particular and heavy significance for all the Fisher family, of standing out in memory as one of those days when all the world seems to be awry.

Aubrey awoke to the muffled, stifled sound of sobs beside him, where Amy lay. And the sight of her, so young, so pitifully frail and worn, touched him. He was deeply moved as he drew

her to him; his voice was full of tenderness as he tried to soothe and comfort her.

"Don't, honey, don't," he said. "I'm not worth having you feel so bad, no matter what they do to me. And they can't do more than fine me, at the most. That cop wasn't badly hurt, and it was an accident — even if they put all the blame on me, it was an accident, just the same."

"Oh, Aubrey, I couldn't bear it if they — they — if they took you away from me, even for a little while! I just couldn't bear it — I'd die! I can't get along without you — you're all I've got in the world —"

"You'll never have to get along without me, honey. I couldn't get along without you, either. Never did care much what happened to me before I got you. There, there, honey — don't cry so — don't —"

But he was touched by fear of the outcome of his trial himself. It affected him, at last. Perhaps it was Amy's fright and worry, communicating itself to him; perhaps it was the gloomy presage of the day, as he looked out while he shaved; he was unusually silent at breakfast, and absent-minded. Mrs. Fisher's barbed words left him untouched; he had not the spirit to an-

swer her. So they served only to wound Amy anew. Joe stopped his mother at last.

"Oh, let up, Mom!" he said. "Aubrey's got to take his medicine from the judge. Don't you go punishing him, too."

"It's the judge I'm sorry for," said Mrs. Fisher. "Havin' to hear that fellow talk his head off! I guess maybe he'll get so outdone with him he'll discharge him just to get rid of him."

Amy blazed up at that. She sprang to her feet; she faced her mother, eyes on fire, cheeks red.

"I think you're hateful! I believe you wish they'd send Aubrey to jail!" she cried. "You'd think no one had ever had any bad luck before!"

"I'll have you remember this is my house, young lady!" cried Mrs. Fisher.

"Mom!" said Joe. "For God's sake — can't we have a little peace here? You know how Pop hated a row at the table —"

The storm passed; Aubrey, for once, had refrained from fanning the flames of discussion.

Joe, too, faced the long hours of the day in stress and turmoil of spirit. It was all very well for Aubrey to talk — but it wasn't his whole life and future that depended on what Meyers and

Stevens did! Suppose they really were sore? Suppose Farley got sore, too, and left him flat? Where would he be then? He wished he'd never said a word to Aubrey! Yet it was characteristic of Joe, it revealed his essential quality, that he did not greatly blame Aubrey; that he credited him with honesty and singleness of purpose. Aubrey had meant well; had believed he was doing the right thing.

Mrs. Fisher fumed and fussed. She was concerned about Aubrey. They would all be in the papers. Suppose they sent that blatherskite to jail? Serve him right — oh, true enough. But the disgrace would touch them all. Never had any one within Mrs. Fisher's circle come close, before, to such humiliation and abasement. It was hard to bear. And Joe jumping on her that way, when she opened her mouth to speak her mind! She wished she was dead!

Over at the Hyland house, too, there was gloom and an atmosphere of depression that matched the day. Clara, worried and distraught, watched Frank, as he sat, saying nothing, not even reading the paper. He looked straight past her; she knew he didn't so much as see her. He drank his coffee, he ate his breakfast, mechanically. When Clara spoke he started before he an-

swered; she had to recall him, each time, from some dim, distant world of thought in which, it seemed to her, she had no place.

How long could it go on? She didn't know. She didn't know the limits of her own endurance of this silence. And Frank, too . . . he wasn't happy. He couldn't be. Oh, she'd known he was quiet before she married him. She was quiet, too, for that matter. She didn't want a constant stream of talk, such as Amy and Aubrey had, most likely. But there was such a thing as a communion of thought and spirit between man and wife; an understanding beyond the need of words. That was what she craved and needed; what, in the first days of her marriage, she had believed she and Frank were to have always, world without end. And now . . . !

The way he sat there, his eyes wandering, all the misery of his spirit revealed for her to see — although he did not know that was so. She wanted to comfort him; to go to him, to put her arms about him, to offer to do anything that would lighten this dark and mysterious burden that lay upon his spirit. If only he would talk — if only he would tell her what was wrong! But he could not. She knew him well enough for that. Whatever trouble came to him, Frank

Hyland would bear it alone, bear it in silence, come through to triumph or defeat alone, unaided. That was his way — and she loved him for it, even while it brought her close to the point of shrieking out in her agony.

But if only she could help! If only she knew!

He may have wished that, too, as he looked at her. Her instinct was right, as nearly always it was. Frank faced a crisis; he saw that dimly himself. Late on Saturday Gertrude's customary summons had come; he was to meet her today for lunch. And he knew that this time she meant to force him to a decision; that now he must choose, once and for all, between her and Clara; between love and — duty. And he was not ready for that choice.

Life had become unreal for Frank Hyland all at once. It had become a dim and misty place, peopled by ghosts, by disembodied spirits. No matter which way he turned, reality eluded his grasp. He was suspended, as it were, in some strange dimension of space. In truth, he was groping toward a realization that, sooner or later, all must achieve, but that, for those habitually unselfish, disposed to think first of others, is difficult beyond all words to grasp and understand.

For the first time in his life, really, Frank Hyland faced the need of making a decision that should be based wholly upon his own desire. He had tried, since that last, long, strangely revealing talk with Gertrude, to see his duty clear. And he could not. He might serve Gertrude well — and leave Clara, cast up upon a shore of disaster. He might just hide behind his vows to Clara — but how be sure that, sacrificing Gertrude so, he might not be bringing Clara herself to an unhappiness longer and more devastating than that which the other course entailed?

He had, and it was that which he was beginning to see, only the one fixed and ascertainable fact to go upon — if he could come to that. What did he himself wish most to do? Leave out that he wanted to make both Gertrude and Clara happy; he could not. Nor could he strike a balance between the happiness of one and the unhappiness of the other. He had no way of weighing those two remote and abstract things. He must choose — and he must choose selfishly, with no thought of any other living being save himself. Only so could he hope to reach a decision of any sort — and yet, decide he must. And to-day! So much was sure.

Clara's voice interrupted his thoughts. He

had to rouse himself; to ask her what she had said. As always she was patient, though suffering edged her voice as she answered him.

"I asked, are you going to court with Aubrey?"

"Yes — oh, yes. Not this morning, though. They're going to telephone me if his case comes up. But no one thinks it will be called till afternoon. They'll take the ordinary cases first — speeding and traffic violations — parking too long — and all that sort of thing. They'll save Aubrey's for the last, because there'll be so many witnesses."

"He ought just to plead guilty — I'll bet he'd get off easier."

"I think so too, but he won't. He says he'll make them let him off."

"Suppose they fine him, Frank?"

He sighed wearily.

"Well — suppose they do? They probably will. I can't see what chance he has of getting off."

"He couldn't pay a fine — if it was only ten dollars —"

"Oh, well — I guess I could help him out, in a pinch."

"I don't like it," said Clara. "I wouldn't

mind if it was some friend of yours, Frank — you know that. But you'd never have known him, even, if our Amy hadn't married him."

"That's all right, Clara. I don't mind. He'd do anything he could for me, if things were different."

"Do you know, I think he would. I think he'd be generous enough, if he had money. You sort of believe that about him, for all his big talk."

"Yes. What are you going to do to-day, Clara?"

She flushed with pleasure at the simple, ordinary question. It was so seldom that he cared!

"I'm going over to Mom's. That insurance man is coming with the check, and you know how Mom hates to do business of any kind — it always gets her rattled. And she'll be fretting about Aubrey. I'll stay there, I guess, till you people get back from court."

"I'll go there too, then, after the trial," said Frank. And then he caught himself, and started. How did he know what he'd do that afternoon — where he'd be? He knew, well enough, what was in Gertrude's mind; what, inevitably, she would propose.

"All right," said Clara. "I'll wait for you."

CHAPTER XII

I

AFTERNOON of that gray Monday had come. Still the rain fell persistently, a fine, blown mist, like a wicked spray. Clara was waiting with her mother. Waiting for the insurance man. Waiting for word of Aubrey. Waiting for something else — what, she did not know. But she had that oppressed manifestation of instinct, that feeling that some call a premonition, not of evil so much, as of something impending, happening — something, bound vitally to affect her, and transpiring beyond her knowledge, outside of all her ken, so that she could not control it or direct it or take so much as a step in her own behalf.

The man from the insurance office came at last. He was late; he knew it, and was sorry. A worn, stooped man, Rogers by name; pleasant in manner; relieved, probably, to find these women contained, not audible in their grief. He must have had to see so many!

There were papers for Mrs. Fisher to sign.

There was, in her, an innate distrust of papers one was asked to sign; she'd heard strange tales. You had to be careful; how should one know what one mightn't be committing one's self to? But Clara was there; she had a level head.

"Just a receipt and a quittance, you know, Mrs. Hyland," Rogers was explaining. Clara was looking quickly over the forms. "A matter of form — we always get them. Then I give your mother the check."

"All right, Mom. It just acknowledges that you've got a thousand dollars and haven't any more claim against the company — that's all. Go ahead and sign —"

"But I haven't got any thousand dollars —"

"I've got the check right here — I'm only waiting for you to be done with the pen before I countersign it, Mrs. Fisher."

Mrs. Fisher squared off, as to a formidable task.

"All right — it's all right if you both say so, I guess. Where do I sign — here?"

"Yes — right on the dotted line —"

She looked up sharply. Then she signed, slowly and laboriously, tracing each letter with a meticulous care.

"That's it — thank you, Mrs. Fisher. Now —"

He took the pen from her, signed the check, blotted it, and held it out to her. "There's your check — one thousand dollars."

"Thank you."

"That's money we like to pay, in a way, Mrs. Fisher — and in a way it's money we don't like to pay, too."

"No. Things can't ever be very pleasant when this kind of money's being paid over." She sighed deeply. "Poor Neil!"

"Well, at least it doesn't make unpleasant times any the less pleasant, Mrs. Fisher. Money's usually a welcome visitor, whenever it comes."

"Well, it's a sure thing I don't know what a lot of folks'd do without the insurance money when there's a death."

"That's so. But it's mighty hard to make a lot of them see it that way before the pinch comes, Mrs. Fisher. You'd think they believed death wasn't ever coming their way, or any other misfortune."

"That's so, Mr. Rogers. Mighty few of us think much about trouble when we're not having it," agreed Mrs. Fisher.

"No. I suppose most of us think we're never going to have it."

"That's foolish. Everybody'll have trouble if they live long enough, one way or another."

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, now, what do I do with this check, Mr. Rogers?"

"Why, you can deposit it in the bank — just sign your name on the back first. Or you can get it cashed and get the money — just whichever you like."

"Frank can get it cashed for you, Mom, if you like," said Clara.

"I'm not used to thousand-dollar checks, you know, Mr. Rogers."

"Well, I'm not very well used to them myself, Mrs. Fisher," said Mr. Rogers with a little laugh, "except to pay them out to people this way. I'd like to have all the money I've paid out just in the last year — I think I'd be able to buy a farm and retire."

"I guess that's right," said Mrs. Fisher. "Well — will you take this then, Clara, and give it to Frank?"

"Yes," said Clara. "You indorse it first — I'll give it to him to-night."

"Well, don't you go layin' it down somewhere and forgettin' where you left it, like you always do with your gloves."

"I won't, Mom — I'll put it right in my purse, where it'll be safe."

"I guess it'll be all right, then. It's still rainin', ain't it, Mr. Rogers? Too bad you have to be out so much in this weather."

"Oh, you get used to that in my business, Mrs. Fisher — we don't mind the weather. Oh, by the way — would you give this to your son-in-law, Mr. Piper?"

He held out a paper, and Mrs. Fisher took it suspiciously.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Why, it's just a little leaflet we get out, describing a particularly attractive accident policy we've brought out lately. I was talking to Mr. Piper about accident insurance the day I was here before, and he seemed to be very much interested. We find that, very often — that when people see money actually being paid out on account of insurance they take more interest in the subject for themselves —"

"What sort of policy did you say this was — accident?" asked Clara.

"Yes — but it's not like the usual accident policy. The disability provisions are much more liberal, and there's a straight life benefit too. We think it's the best policy that's ever been

brought out. A lot of people think we figured too closely on the premiums, but we're sure of our figures."

"How much is it for?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Why, no particular amount. We will write them as low as ten thousand dollars. But Mr. Piper seemed to be specially interested in the fifty-thousand-dollar policy — which is the one we urge our prospects to take, when their means warrant it, for the dividend features make it the most economical in the long run."

Clara laughed. Rogers looked at her sharply.

"That's true, I assure you — and I can prove it to you, Mrs. Hyland —"

"That wasn't what she was laughin' at — not at anythin' you was sayin', Mr. Rogers. But if you knew Mr. Piper as well as she knows him, you'd laugh too. He has just about as much notion of taking out a fifty-thousand-dollar insurance policy as I have, and just about as much chance of paying for it."

"Why — but he seemed very much interested, Mrs. Fisher!"

"He was showin' off, Mr. Rogers, what he's always doin'. Why, that fellow don't make enough salary in six months to pay one year's premium on a policy like this. So, if I was

you, I'd just put this paper right back in my pocket, for you're only wastin' it, givin' it to him."

"Well — you know, of course. But it seems rather funny he should talk about it at all, if he had no idea of taking it."

"He never has any idea when *he* talks, Mr. Rogers — that's why he talks so much. It's no effort for him. He don't need ideas, like most folks. That's the reason he's only gettin' thirty-two dollars a week down in the Pennsylvania Railroad freight office. And it's a wonder to me they give him that much, after listenin' to him for five minutes!"

"Well, it certainly seems funny. I spoke about the ten-thousand-dollar policy, but that didn't interest him at all — he didn't pay much attention to me till I told him about the fifty-thousand-dollar one."

"Well, I can understand him being interested in the accident part of it, all right, after last Monday. I s'pose you read about him runnin' into everythin' that was loose here last Monday evening, didn't you?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "Down here at Broad and Erie Avenue."

"Oh, was that Mr. Piper?"

"That was him — the same fellow. He run

into a traffic cop and broke his arm, just for one thing."

"Well, I saw that in the paper, but the name was spelled Pepper in my paper."

"It was? Well, it was spelled Piper all right in the paper I saw. And that's who it was."

"What did they do about that, Mrs. Fisher?"

"Why, they haven't done it yet, but I guess they're doing it now. He's down at the magistrate's, gettin' a hearin'. God knows what they'll do to him. He didn't have a license — and he didn't own the car he was driving."

"That's very unfortunate. I'm afraid they may be pretty severe with him."

"Oh, I guess he'll talk his way out of the worst of it."

"Well, I'm afraid he won't want to see me, anyway, when he comes back."

"He may not be back for six months."

"Oh, let's hope it won't be anything like that! I don't believe they'll do any more than fine him, anyway."

"No, neither do I," said Clara. "Good afternoon, Mr. Rogers — and thank you."

"Good afternoon. I'm only sorry for the occasion of our meeting. Let me know if there is anything I can do for you, any time."

"He's a nice man," said Mrs. Fisher, when he had gone. "I s'pose they aim to get nice-spoken men in that business, though. I'm glad you were here, Clara. I don't understand things like them insurance papers."

"It's all simple enough, really. They keep things as simple as they can. What do you think you'll do with that money, Mom?"

"Why, I think I'll just put it in a bank somewhere. Everything's paid — I haven't anything to spend it for. Then I'll know I have something in my old age when it comes. And that won't be so long now."

"Oh, nonsense, Mom — you're not old. Do you want me to put that check right in Frank's bank in your name?"

"No. Get it cashed first, so I can see the money. A check don't ever seem like money to me. Clara, can you imagine that clown, takin' up that man's time talkin' about a fifty-thousand-dollar policy — and him in debt up to his eyes!"

"Oh, what does it matter, Mom? You can't ever change a man like Piper, no matter how you try. Might just as well take him as he is and be done with it."

"Oh, I know — but I hate to see him makin' such a fool of our Amy, and with his name in all

the papers, and the whole city laughing at him."

"He doesn't care. He likes that. He thinks it makes him seem important. I think he'd like to go to jail and be able to call himself a martyr."

"The trouble is our Amy's married to him, Clara — that's what worries me about him and everything."

"Amy doesn't mind things like that, either, Mom, so long as it's Aubrey."

"Well, she ought to mind, if she's got any proper pride left at all, like I brought her up to have. You've got to take account of what people think of you."

"Oh, I know. But Amy's in love with him, Mom." Clara's tone was wistful. "She doesn't see him through the same eyes that other people do. And she doesn't hear what he says with the same sort of ears we have."

"You're always talkin' about love. You give me a pain — love, love, love!"

"Well, don't you think she is in love with him, Mom? And you know —"

"How do I know whether she's in love with him or not? I don't know anything about when people are in love, except that most of them act silly — most everybody that I ever knew that

was did. And I'm sure *she* acted silly enough when she took *him,* if that means anything about love!"

"Well, she might have taken worse, Mom."

"My God, Clara — you were as set against it as I was — and your Pop! What's come over you?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mom. He does his best. He works right along, and he gives her all his money, and nobody ever heard of him even lookin' at another woman."

"But he's such a rattle-brain, Clara!"

"Oh, there are lots of things that are harder to put up with in a man than that, Mom. I know he's terribly silly and he talks too much and all that, but — I don't know, I feel kind of sorry for him, sometimes. He'd love it so if he were some one important, like he pretends to be, and, of course, he never will be."

"Well, every one to his own taste, but I swear I don't know how Amy stands the everlastin' talk of that one. He's been here now less than a week, and I'm tellin' you, Clara, I'm nearly light-headed from havin' to hear him at it all the time. I'll be glad when they go."

"Well, I'd rather have a man that talked too much than one of those that never says anythin'

at all — one of those silent ones. Honestly, Mom, I think sometimes if Frank Hyland doesn't say something, I'll go out of my mind."

"Why, what do you want him to say?" her mother asked, surprised.

"Anything — anything at all — just so I'll know he's still got his voice!"

"Well, I know Frank Hyland, Clara, and he's too sensible a man to be talkin' when he has nothing to say."

"I don't think it's so sensible, Mom, never to have anything to say," persisted Clara.

"Well, but lots of men are that way in the house."

"I know, but usually there's children, and then it's not so bad. You hear something, anyway."

"Well, if Amy does have children, and they have as much to say as their father, I don't know what'll become of her — she'll never hear herself think, that's all."

"She'll get along some way. People always do."

"Leanin' on some one else — that's how a lot of them get along, Clara, take it from me."

"There'll always be the leaners and the bearers, Mom, I guess. But if Amy's in love with the

man she's married to, and he's in love with her, and they do have children —"

"I never saw a married woman so full of love! You're always talkin' about it — you're like a girl that's never had anythin' to do with men —"

"Maybe it's because I've never had it, Mom."

Mrs. Fisher looked at her sharply.

"What do you mean? Don't your man love you — is that what you mean?"

Clara nodded her beautiful head. And she sighed the same, long, deep sigh that Frank Hyland had heard.

"He loved some other woman before he ever met me, Mom."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, but I know. I know it from things he's said, sometimes, that he didn't know I'd understand. And from the way he acts. Oh, you can tell, Mom, if you — if you care yourself."

"Why didn't he marry her, then?"

"I don't know. I think he lost her, Mom. I don't know whether she died — or whether she married some other man. Oh, Mom — it'd break your heart to hear the things he says, sometimes. I think that's why he's so kind — he is, you know, Mom — he's the *kindest* man I've ever known!"

"He's a good man, Clara, and that's even better."

"Oh, I don't know whether it is or not, Mom! I get so sometimes I don't know what to think! But I think that's the reason he sort of likes to give this Aubrey Piper a hand now and then, because he sees Amy's in love with him and he with her."

"Well, a body can't have everything in this world, Clara. And you've a deal to be thankful for, compared to most women. Don't ever go to forgettin' that."

II

All morning Aubrey and Amy sat in the stuffy courtroom, waiting for Aubrey's name to be called. They sat and listened to the routine cases, one after the other. Most of the defendants, looking sheepish, pleaded guilty, paid their fines, and departed as quickly as they could. A few tried to contradict the testimony of the complaining officers. Upon these the judge delighted, it seemed, to practice his irony. He had a reputation for a cruel and biting wit. But the outcome was invariably the same; there was only this difference, that those who pleaded guilty, if it were their first offense, got off, as

a rule, with a ten-dollar fine, while those who took up the court's time were likely to have to pay twenty-five or even more.

Aubrey sat there, contemptuous, smiling, seemingly at his ease, while Amy trembled.

"Just watch them — listen to them!" he said. "Going up like sheep to sign on the dotted line! I'll show them something when it's my turn. That judge isn't a bit better man than I am. I help to pay his salary — he'll be after my vote when he wants to be reëlected. I've got a right to be heard — and I will be."

"Oh, do be careful what you say, Aubrey — there might be some one listening to you —"

A little after eleven a policeman, one of those who had taken part in Aubrey's arrest, came and spoke to him. He was kindly enough; the police seldom feel any hostility toward those they have to arrest.

"You might's well go and get a bite of lunch," he said. "Your case won't come up till afternoon. Be back by two o'clock, sharp, though. Your case might be the first one they'd call, and you don't want to get the judge any more down on you than he's likely to be anyway."

"There you are!" said Aubrey. "That's the said and done on this business, isn't it! A fine

court of justice when you have to be careful to keep the judge from getting down on you any more than he is before he's heard a bit of the evidence! What is this — Philadelphia or Russia?"

"Sh-sh — Aubrey — please —"

"You'll get justice, all right," said the policeman. "I was just sort of hopin' for your wife's sake that you wouldn't. Have it your own way, though."

And he walked off.

"He was just trying to be friendly, I do think, Aubrey," said Amy, as they went out.

"Oh, sure he was! He wants to be nice, all right! Those cops know they're liable to be in pretty bad if the facts of this case ever come out — they'll be lucky not to be up on charges themselves! But they can't fool me. No, sir."

"We'd better telephone to Frank, hadn't we — and tell him about being here at two o'clock?"

"Yes. I'll get him right away. Or — do you mind doing it, Amy? I want to call the office — it worries me, sort of, being away so long. They're a dumb lot, those clerks down there."

So it was Amy who called Frank Hyland, in his office. He was sitting alone at his desk, staring straight ahead, when her call came.

"Oh, hello, Amy!" he said. "Do you need me yet?"

"No." And she told him of the delay. "But we all want to be ready at two o'clock, the officer said. Can you be there, Frank?"

He hesitated a moment.

"Yes, all right. I'll be there, Amy," he promised. "Don't you worry, now."

"Oh, I can't help it, Frank! That judge's awful strict — and he looks at you so sternly, over his glasses —"

For a few moments more Frank sat alone, staring. Then he sighed. Always something. Something you had to consider, outside yourself, beyond yourself. Something, beyond your own wishes, that you had to take into account. He went to meet Gertrude.

He was shocked, for a moment, when he saw her. She was pale; there were circles under her eyes. They met in a small, obscure restaurant near City Hall, a place that had a back room with just a few tables, while most of its business was done at a great lunch counter, in front, where things were served quickly to those in a hurry.

"Hello," he said. "I didn't think you were

coming East again so soon." He spoke lamely; he knew it.

"I had to come, Frank," she said. "I — I don't know how to tell you. That man — Frank — he isn't human — he's a devil! He's crazy mad about this girl — he's bound and determined to marry her. And he says — Frank — he's got hold of something —"

"About us?"

"No — no — I'm sure he hasn't. But — there was a friend of mine — a man — out in Chicago — just a friend, Frank — but he says he's going to sue me for divorce and charge this man — It's a lie, Frank — he just wants to get out of paying me any money, like he'd have to do if I divorced him! I wish to God I'd done it long ago, now —"

"But he can't — a man's got to prove charges like that, Gertrude —"

"Prove! You don't know him — you don't know the pull he's got! He can get people to swear anything he likes. I wouldn't have a chance!"

Panic had gripped her utterly now. No longer could she maintain even an affectation of calm. All her defenses were crumbling away.

"I haven't got a living soul in the world to

turn to but you, Frank! Oh, Frank — I know I treated you badly — but you said you'd always love me! Now's the time I need you, Frank —"

"What can I do?" His voice was curiously calm and measured; it surprised him by its calm. And to her it was like a dash of cold water.

"If I can go to him — if I can tell him you want to marry me — that you'll marry me as soon as we're both free — I think he'll stop this other thing —"

In that moment Frank saw, for the first time, the Gertrude of to-day. No longer was she before him, radiant in her lost youth, in the first flush of her beauty. He saw her as she was. He saw the cruel, hard line of her thin lips; the gleam in her eyes; the ravages the years had worked in her. And, too, for the first time, he compared her to Clara; compared the two women as women. As human beings. He compared the stuff of their beings, their spirits, their minds.

"Frank!" She was desperate. "Aren't you going to say anything to me? Are you just going to sit there and watch me drown? That's what it comes to! If you go back on me I'll kill myself — I can't go on if he does that to me — I'd go mad —"

"I don't think I understand, Gertrude," he

said, rather dully. He only sounded dull; he wasn't, really. But she thought he was, and anger blazed up in her, as anger does, outrageously, and foolishly, when people, and especially women of a certain type, are afraid. She couldn't know that what he meant was that he didn't want to understand. She couldn't know of the way that ideals, ideas, that he had cherished, that for years had sustained him, were being shattered. Gertrude, after all, had had few dealings with ideals. It hadn't been her fault, altogether, but it was so.

"You fool!" she cried. "Can't you see? He can ruin me — and he knows it! He hates me enough to do it!"

"He can ruin you!" Frank echoed, stupidly. "But — but — if this man was just your friend — things like that can't happen —"

"Oh, you and your talk!" Her voice was shrill; she beat upon the table between them with her fists. "What does it matter? What difference does it make what I've done? The thing is what he can do to me — when he's done the same thing — and worse — a thousand times worse! But he's a man — and who'd care? No matter what I could prove? And I can't prove anything —"

And then, as she saw his eyes, realization of what she had done came to her, too late. Lack of any understanding of him had been her fatal, her disastrous and irreparable blunder, sure, in the end, to ruin her from the very start. She had never understood him; never believed in him. She had never known, indeed, that there were men for whom honor and truth were still more than outworn words. She had believed in the supreme power and authority of desire; she had been sure that every man in whom desire had once been kindled could be forever ruled by it — until — ah — until it had been satisfied! But now, even before he spoke, she knew that she had lost.

"Then — all this time — there's been — there really has been this other man," he said. It wasn't a question, at all; it was a statement. It wasn't an accusation, either; his tone deprived her, somehow, of the recourse of vehement, aggressive exculpation, in which a woman of her sort becomes, after a time, skillful to an amazing degree. She couldn't speak at all; she could only look at him, with desperate, frightened eyes.

"I'm sorry, Gertrude," he said, very simply. That was what baffled her and silenced her; his

terrible simplicity. She had ceased long ago to understand simplicity, if, indeed, she had ever understood it. "I'm beginning to see that we've both been wrong. I'm sorry."

He looked at his watch.

"I have to go," he said.

"You can't! What's to become of me?" she cried.

"I have to go," he said, again. "I have to be somewhere at two o'clock, because a friend of mine needs me."

"I need you, too —"

"There is nothing I can do for you," he said.

She winced as if he had struck her. She was well enough used to cruelty of certain sorts. But the quiet savagery of such a man as Frank Hyland, once his eyes were opened, she had never known before; nothing had taught her to expect it, nor how to meet it. And, indeed, there is no way to meet it, nor to combat it; it can only be suffered and endured.

"Good-by," he said. He couldn't repeat her name; it had meant too much to him. In it, somehow, although he could never have put it so, all the beauty of life and of the world had been enshrined for him. And it was, now, as if he

had come to the realization suddenly that all his life he had worshiped at the altar of a false god.

She watched him go, stricken to a strange and unwonted silence.

CHAPTER XIII

CLARA and her mother waited at home. Mrs. Fisher had wanted to go to court; Clara persuaded her to stay away.

"You'd just get mad, Mom," she said. "Frank'll be there — he'll see to it that everything's all right."

Clara could comfort her mother, but she was held herself in the grip of an almost invincible depression. Life was doing its worst to her, and she saw no relief, wherever she looked. She was worried about Amy. What real chance had she for happiness? Aubrey was never going to amount to anything. That was plain to Clara. There was, literally, nothing behind him; behind his carnation, his big talk. Clara, without any great degree of culture herself, was still able to penetrate the sham of Aubrey's talk. Amy never would, of course. And there was some comfort in that.

Aubrey puzzled her. He was, really, an utterly insignificant and unimportant person. Yet he was able profoundly to affect other people; to alter the courses of their lives. He must have,

it seemed to Clara, a certain force. He couldn't direct it; he could never turn it to any useful end. Yet it was there. It influenced Frank; it had its effect on Joe. It had disturbed her father; it accounted for her mother's inability to be five minutes in a room with Aubrey without losing her temper.

It was late in the afternoon, and dusk had fallen, before Clara heard the front door open and close. Amy, tired and worn, came in. Her eyes were dull and lusterless; her steps dragged.

"Is that you, Amy?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "What happened?" Her voice rose to a shrill note of alarm. "Where's Aubrey Piper?"

"He's coming."

Clara, too, was conscious of the swift feeling of relief that her mother's eyes betrayed.

"Is Frank with him?" she asked.

"Yes. They stopped at the cigar store at the corner. I came on — I was so tired."

"Oh! What happened down there, Amy?"

"Oh, a lot of talk! You get tired, listening!"

Her mother eyed her sharply.

"You look sick, Amy," she said. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, I'm just tired, Mom! You'd be, too —"

"Well, you look sick," Mrs. Fisher insisted.

"I'm not, Mom! Please! My head aches a little, that's all. The air was bad there, and we had to wait so long."

"Take off your hat," said Clara.

"Will I make you a cup of tea?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Don't you bother, Mom. Maybe I'll get some for myself in a minute," said Amy.

"You sit down and rest yourself. The kettle's on the boil. I can get it in a minute or two."

She went out, and Clara went over and leaned down beside Amy.

"Tell me what they did, Amy," she said, in a whisper.

"Oh, Clara!" Amy cried out, but she, too, kept her voice low. "It was dreadful! The judge was terribly unfair. He wouldn't give Aubrey a chance to defend himself! He bullied him — and he bullied the witnesses, too, so that they were afraid to talk. And he fined him —"

"Of course!" said Clara. "I knew they'd fine him! How much, Amy?"

Amy hesitated. Her eyes were tragic as she raised them to meet Clara's.

"A — a — thousand dollars!"

"A thousand dollars!" Clara gasped. "Why, Amy — that's terrible! What did he do?"

Amy just stared at her.

"Did Frank Hyland pay it, Amy?"

"Yes — oh, yes, he did, Clara! I told him I'd be responsible — that I'd pay him back every cent of it, just as soon as I could —"

"Oh, but how can you, Amy? How can you ever get a thousand dollars to pay him back?"

"I can go back to work. That's what I'm going to do. They told me I could come back if I ever wanted to. Frank was going to pay it anyway, Clara. He said we couldn't have Aubrey going to jail for six months."

"Well, now, of course we couldn't have that, Amy! I'm glad he paid it. I truly am. He's a good man, Amy."

"Oh, he is, Clara! I think he's the kindest man in the world!"

"Don't you feel bad, Amy. They'd no business being so hard as all that on Aubrey. He didn't do wrong on purpose. Was there any one we knew in the court, Amy?"

"I didn't see anybody. There were fourteen witnesses, though. And the cop was there, too — the one whose arm was broken. He *said* he held up his hand for Aubrey to stop and kept whistling at him. But it wouldn't have been so bad if Aubrey'd had a license. That was what

made the trouble, really. And it's not fair, Clara — it's not! If there hadn't been an accident, nobody'd have known he didn't have a license! He says thousands of people are drivin' around every day without a license."

"Well — it can't be helped, now. When do you think you'll go back to work, Amy?"

Amy hesitated.

"As soon as I get — settled again. There's no use in my going back right now. I'd only have to be leaving again pretty soon."

"Amy! Do you mean that?" Amy nodded. "Does Mom know?"

"No, I haven't told her. I haven't told any one but you, yet. I'm sorry, Clara —"

"Don't you worry, Amy!" Clara was by her; suddenly her arms clasped Amy close. "Oh, Amy — I wish to God it was me!"

There was a stir at the front door. And Amy, who was crying, slipped away from Clara and seized her hat.

"I'm going into the parlor a minute —" she said, and fled.

In came Aubrey, cheerful, debonair, swinging his cane.

"Hello, Clara!" he said.

"Hello!"

"Where's Amy? She came in, didn't she?"

"Yes. She's tired — she's gone into the parlor a minute, where it's dark — her head aches."

Concerned, Aubrey went into the parlor. After a moment Frank Hyland came in quietly; Clara stifled the impulse of affection that nearly sent her to him.

"I thought you'd go back to the office, maybe," she said.

"It was so late when we got through down there I didn't think it was worth while, to-day," he said.

"The way they waste a business man's time — it's easy to see how important time is to those people!" said Aubrey, coming out.

"Hello!" said Mrs. Fisher, who had come in from the kitchen. "You're back again, are you?"

"Right on the job, Mother — doing business at the old stand!"

"Hello, Mother!" said Frank Hyland. "You're looking good."

"Well, I'm not feeling good, I can tell you that, Frank."

"Why, what's the trouble?"

"I'm troubled to think of all the bother you've

been put to in this business, and no concern of yours."

"Oh, don't worry about that, Mother. We've all got to have a little bother once in a while."

"What did they do down there, Frank?"

"Why — they —"

"I'll tell you what they *tried* to do —" Aubrey began, importantly.

"Oh, shut up, you! Nobody wants to hear what you've got to say about it at all."

"Well, I told them down there what I had to say about it, whether they wanted to hear it or not!"

"Yeah — and I guess they let you go just to get rid of the sound of your voice, too!"

Aubrey looked at her, and then, as if it weren't worth while to answer, went back to Amy in the parlor.

"What *did* they say to that fellow down there, Frank?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Why, nothing very much, Mother. They just gave him a little reprimand for driving without a license."

"Didn't they fine him at all, for breakin' that man's arm and all the mischief he did?"

"Oh, they fined him a little — not very much. You see, that was an accident."

"How much was it, Frank?"

"Now, Mother Fisher—" Frank laughed. "As Aubrey says, 'That's all washed up and signed on the dotted line.' Let's forget about that."

"How much was it, Clara? Do you know?"

"Frank hasn't told me, Mom."

"Well, I'll bet you paid it, Frank, whatever it was. I know that fellow didn't have it, if it was only five dollars."

"Oh, well, you know it's getting near Christmas, Mother — got to give some kind of a little present here and there."

"Well, now, I don't think it's right that you should have to be goin' around paying for that fellow's foolishness and mischief-making."

Frank gave Clara a long look.

"That's about what we all of us have to be doing in this world, Mother — paying for other people's mistakes and foolishness and mischief-making. And somebody's paying for ours, just the same, never fear."

"It don't seem right to me, for all you say, Frank."

"Well, I'll tell you, Mother — when you've made a couple of mistakes that *can't* be paid for, that you don't find out about until it's too late,

and somebody else has had to pay for them, why, you try to make up for it a little by payin' for the kind that you can."

He went over toward the rack where his overcoat was hanging.

"You going out, Frank?" asked Clara.

"Yes, for a little while. I've got some business to attend to down this way — if I do it now, I won't have to come out to-morrow, and I'll be busy, then, at the office. I'll stop back for you."

"All right."

"Good-by, dear," he said.

Clara started as she looked at him. Was there — was there a new note in his voice — a note she hadn't heard for so long that she had almost forgotten it had ever sounded for her? He was gone.

"Clara!"

"Yes, Mom?"

"Didn't he tell you how much they fined Aubrey?"

"No, he didn't, Mom, really."

"Didn't she tell you while I was out putting the tea on?"

"Well, now, what does it matter, Mom? You won't have to pay it."

"I'll find out, don't you fret. It'll be in the paper, most likely."

"Well, I wouldn't say anything to Amy about it, even if it is. She's got enough to bother her now."

"She brought it on herself, didn't she? Nobody could tell her anything and have her listen."

"Oh, I know, Mom — but there's nothing can be done by fighting with her now."

"There's nothing can be done by *anything,* Clara," said Mrs. Fisher, "when once the main thing is done. And that's the marriage. That's where all the trouble starts — gettin' married."

"If there were no marriages, Mom, there'd be no world."

"Oh, everybody says that — if there were no marriages there'd be no world."

"Well, would there?"

"Well, what if there wouldn't? Do you think it'd be any worse than it is now? I think there'll be no world anyway, pretty soon, the way things are goin'. A lot of whiffets gettin' married and not two cents to their names, and then throwin' themselves on their people to keep them. They're so full of love before they're married. You're about the only one I've heard talkin'

about love *after* they're married! And it's a wonder to me you have a roof over you, for they never have, as a rule, with that kind of talk. Like the two in the parlor there — that has to kiss each other, every time they meet after five minutes!"

"Amy's going to have a child, Mom," said Clara, after a moment.

"How do you know?"

"She told me so."

"She did! Why didn't she tell me?"

"Oh, I suppose she thought it'd start a fight."

"I don't know why it'd start a fight," said Mrs. Fisher. "*I* never fight with anybody except that fellow Piper, and I wouldn't fight with him, only for his impudence."

"Oh, well, I know, Mom — has Amy said anything to you about coming in here to live?"

"Oh, she was sayin' somethin' the night your father was laid out, but I wasn't payin' much attention to her then."

"*I* think you ought to let them, Mom. Amy'd be company for you, now that Pop is gone. And you don't know what day Joe might take a notion to be gettin' married himself."

"What's changed your ideas so about letting

them come in here? You were the one that was most set against it, warnin' me and all, when she was goin' to be married," said Mrs. Fisher.

"I'd still be against it, Mom, if things were the same around here that they were then. You didn't even own this house, Mom, when they were married. It was Pop's, and I knew if anything happened to him, ever, and he hadn't left a will, you mightn't find it so easy to order anybody out of it, if you had to."

"Well, but you know, Clara, it isn't that I'd mind lettin' *Amy* come in here. It's that I wouldn't like to please him, for I know, the first thing I'd hear, he'd very likely be tellin' somebody that he'd let me come in. Oh, you can laugh, but I wouldn't put it past him — he's told bigger lies than that, and never felt them. An' if I did let them in, and if I ever found out he'd said *that,* he would go out, bag and baggage, inside of five minutes. Here — ain't that child comin' for her tea? It must be like lye by now —"

Clara went to call her, and Amy, smiling, cheered, as she always was after a few minutes alone with Aubrey, came out.

"Don't you want a cup of tea, too, Aubrey?" she asked.

"No, thanks, honey. You go along with your mother and have yours. And don't you worry. Everything'll be all right."

He was wandering about the room as Clara came back from the kitchen.

"Aubrey —" she said. "There's something I want to talk to you about — Oh, bother — there's some one at the door —"

"I'll go," said Aubrey.

It was Gill, the workman who had, on the day of Mr. Fisher's death, brought back his lunch-box and his other belongings.

"Well, Governor — back again?" said Aubrey, as he brought him in. "Clara — this is the gentleman who brought Pop's things back the other day —"

"Oh, yes!" said Clara. "It was so good of you —"

"That's all right, ma'am," said Gill. "Are you Mr. Fisher's other daughter?"

"Yes — oh — is that his watch? I don't want my mother to see it yet — it's one she gave him when they were married."

"That's right, ma'am — it'd only make her feel bad to see that now."

"Yes. I'll just take it, please, and keep it a little while before I give it to her."

"Yes, ma'am. McMahon, he didn't find it that day — he said it was hangin' under the time chart, back of Number Five machine, where they didn't think to look."

"Well, it was very kind of you to bring it."

"I'm only sorry for the reason I had to, ma'am. Mr. Fisher was a mighty hard-working man."

"I suppose he worked too hard, for his age."

"I guess he did, ma'am."

"You couldn't make him stop, though."

"No, ma'am — that's what your brother-in-law here was sayin' that day I was here. He was tellin' me about all the times *he* tried to get him to quit and take a rest. But it ain't so easy to quit when you've worked hard all your life."

"No, I know that," said Clara.

Gill turned toward Aubrey.

"Say, that was a funny thing, Mr. Piper," he said. "The way I was tellin' you all about that automobile smash-up that other time I was here! I didn't know it was you'd been in it."

Clara looked at Aubrey, who drew himself up a little.

"That so?" he said, carelessly.

"No! I didn't know it was you till I saw your picture in the paper next day."

"Oh, yes! They did have to have my picture! In the *Record?* That wasn't a very good picture of me, was it?"

Clara turned away. Could nothing make a dent in the man's armor of conceit?

"I guess newspaper pictures ain't ever very good. I knew it was you, though, the minute I saw it."

"Oh, well!" Aubrey made a gesture of unconcern. "You know the way things happen! Friend of mine lent me his car while mine was laid up — then the cop got mixed up in his signals, and something went wrong with the steering gear just at the same moment, and there it was!"

"I guess you can't trust those automobiles. How did you make out about that officer you hit?"

"Oh, I squared that up, all right!" said Aubrey, magnificently.

"You —" Clara bit her lip. After all — what was the use of letting a stranger see the skeleton in the family closet? "You live out this way, I suppose, Mr. Gill?" she said, changing her works quickly.

But the look she gave Aubrey was eloquent of what she had really meant to say.

"I live out Richmond way, ma'am," said Gill. "I'd like to be as far in as this on account of its being nearer to my work, but I don't believe I could find a house."

"I'm afraid you couldn't. I've not heard of any vacant houses here lately."

"That's what Mr. Piper was saying. He was telling me about the time he had getting this one."

"Oh — yes," said Clara, mastering herself again. She went to the door with Gill. When she came back her eyes were blazing. Aubrey was just disappearing through the kitchen door.

"Come back here, Aubrey!" she said. "I want to talk to you! What do you mean, telling people this is your house?"

"I didn't tell any one it was my house."

"Aubrey! I just heard that man say himself — you must have told him so!"

"What do you think I am — a liar?"

"Yes!" said Clara. "I certainly do!"

But she looked at him rather helplessly. What was the use of getting angry with him? Certainly he wouldn't have said that had he realized how it must affect her; he couldn't be so stupid as that! He didn't seem to be able to help talking so; he had to impress people — even

a man like this Gill, whom he would never see again, probably.

"You do lie, Aubrey — you know you do!" Clara said. "And you lie when there can't be any possible reason for it. But listen to me, now. I want to talk to you seriously. You've made a lot of trouble for us all since you married Amy, and it's time you stopped. What do you expect to happen? There's no reason why my husband should be putting his hand in his pocket on your account all the time."

"Oh, if it's that fine you mean, I'll pay Frank back! If I don't upset the case on appeal — and I probably can —"

"It's not only the fine, Aubrey. He's lent you lots of money beside. And just because he's been careful and has saved his money doesn't give you any right to depend on him —"

"Well, you know how it is, Clara. I'm held down — I've got things under way right now —"

"There you go again! What have you got under way? You've got your job — and it's not half as good a job as you ought to have at your age. You've got to brace up and face facts, Aubrey. I don't think you know it yet, but your wife's going to have a child before very long —"

"Amy?" Aubrey cried out in incredulous de-

light, and the look in his eyes stopped Clara in full course. Oh, he did love Amy! She couldn't forget that; she couldn't help the way the sight of him clutched at her heart.

"Yes," said Clara, her voice softened. "You ought to pull yourself together, Aubrey, and be sensible, like the man of the family. You're smart enough. There's no reason why a fellow like you should be living in two rooms over a barber shop."

"Well, Clara, a man doesn't stand much chance of getting ahead in his job when the boss is down on him."

"There you go again! Why don't you stop talking so much, and throw your carnation away, and come down to earth! Maybe he wouldn't be so down on you, then! But, after all — there's something else I want to say. I've been talking to Mom, and I asked her if she wouldn't let you and Amy come in here with her."

"Well, that's the sensible thing to do, Clara," said Aubrey.

"I know it is! At least — it might be. Do you know what Mom said, Aubrey? She said she wouldn't mind, except she knew that if she did the first thing she'd hear would be that you'd told some one you'd taken her in. And that's

exactly what you've told that man already! If I told Mom that —"

Aubrey looked sullen.

"I didn't," he said. "I can't help it if people twist what I say around."

"Well — I'm not going to tell her, this time," said Clara. "But you listen, now, Aubrey — because I mean this. The very first time I hear you've told some one this is your house again I'll see to it that you get a house that will be yours."

Aubrey laughed a little. He gave Clara a keen look.

"Well, maybe your mother'd have something to say about that, Clara," he suggested.

"Maybe so, Aubrey. Maybe you could talk her over, like you can Amy. But it wouldn't do you any good. The only thing you need to care about is what I have to say about it. This is my house. Pop left it to me, so that Mom'd always have a roof over her head. He was afraid of what'd happen if Amy got to wheedling her — and if you got after Amy!"

"Your house?" said Aubrey, startled. His ease of manner was shaken at last. "What are you doing — kidding me?"

"Of course I'm not kidding you! I'm giving

you fair warning. But don't you tell any one, Aubrey. Just be sensible — be yourself, as you're always telling other people! You'll have a chance here to live decently and get a little ahead, maybe. If you throw it away there'll be no one but yourself to blame."

Aubrey walked over to the window, thoughtfully, and Clara looked at him. He ought to be abashed, humbled. But she knew, somehow, that he wasn't. And when he turned toward her he was alive with enthusiasm.

"This place isn't hopeless, at all!" he said. "I can —"

"Shh —" said Clara. "Some one's coming —"

It was Amy who came in. Her depression had vanished. She fairly danced as she rushed up to Aubrey and caught his arm.

"Aubrey!" she cried. "Mom says we can come here — we can have my old room —"

"That's great, honey," said Aubrey. "It's the best thing for all of us, I think. Of course, I'd like to build, later —"

He caught Clara's eye as he said that, and stopped, wilting a little.

"Lot's of time to think about that, though," he said, defiantly.

"Let's go up and see where we'll put our furniture," said Amy. "Come on, Aubrey —"

Mrs. Fisher came in from the kitchen in time to see them go upstairs. She sighed as she glanced at Clara.

"Well, I told her," she said. "I said they could have her old room."

"I'm glad you did, Mom," said Clara. "I guess I'd better go next door and telephone that Frank and I'll be staying here for supper."

"Well, put something around you. It's the weather for you to catch something."

"All right!" Clara laughed. "There's Joe now — banging the door. I guess Frank'll be in soon."

"Needn't tell me it's Joe!" muttered Mrs. Fisher, crossly. "It's a wonder you wouldn't take the door off the hinges and be done with it!" she said, as Joe came in. "I s'pose doors don't cost nothing nowadays —"

"Doesn't matter if they do, Mom! Oh, Mom — they've taken it!"

"Taken what?"

"My rust formula!"

"You mean to say they've bought it off you?"

"That's exactly what I mean! Signed on the dotted line! Where's Aubrey?"

"Never you mind about Aubrey! How much did they give you, Joe?"

"One hundred thousand dollars — to start! They sent for me this afternoon — and I'd given up waiting to hear from them again! And we signed the contract right way."

"Well — but what's all this about a hundred thousand dollars?" she asked.

"That's right, Mom!" said Joe. "They gave me that this afternoon, on account. They're going to pay me half the net profits, too."

"Well, but what does that mean? How much will you get?"

"Gosh, Mom — I don't know — nobody does, yet! A couple of hundred thousand dollars a year for the first few years, I guess. Maybe more. You can't tell. There's a fortune in it, though, Mom."

"Well, but did they give you any money, Joe?"

"Sure — I told you! A hundred thousand dollars."

"In money?"

"A check. My lawyer's got it now, in his office."

"Oh, a check!" Mrs. Fisher couldn't hide her disgust. "Well — I suppose it's all right.

What are you going to do now? Quit your job?"

"Sure," said Joe, happily. "But I'm going to work right away on that oil paint. I'll be busier than ever now."

"Will you have to go to Washington, Joe?"

"No. Farley saw to everything down there. They want me to go to Trenton, though."

"When — to-morrow?"

"Oh, I mean to work there. Meyers and Stevens have got one of the finest laboratories in the world there, and they want me to use it. They'd give me a hundred dollars a week just to have first chance at anything I worked out there, too. It's the sort of a chance I've always wanted. I wanted to talk to you first, though."

"What for?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "It's your business."

"Well, but I wouldn't want you to be alone here, Mom. How'd you like to come and keep house for me?"

"I'll not stir from this house. Not to go to a palace! But never you mind me. You go there, if it's for your good."

"I thought you'd not go," said Joe. "An' I was thinking, Mom — why not let Amy come back here? She's having a pretty hard time of it, I guess, and she and Aubrey —"

"They're in already, Joe," said Mrs. Fisher. "I'm lettin' them have her old room."

"Well, that's good. And I can come home over Sunday."

"It's too far, isn't it?"

"It's only thirty-eight miles. I'll buy a car and run over — won't take me much more than an hour."

"Only thirty-eight miles? Is that all the further Trenton is from Philadelphia?"

"That's all!"

Joe laughed at her astonishment.

"How'll you be buying a car? You're getting to talk like Aubrey Piper!"

"Well, but what have I got money for, Mom?"

He laughed at her, as she sat, trying to grasp what had happened.

"We're going to be rich, Mom!" he said. "Rich! Cheer up — it's all true. I've got to get back now —"

"Supper's just about ready — we were only waiting for you and Frank —"

"I'm sorry, Mom — I can't help it. I've got to see the newspaper men — they want to talk to me. I'll get something downtown."

"Well, listen now, Joe. Don't say anything to him, or he'll be wanting to go and talk to

them, too. You know, they fined him down there to-day."

"Well, he had it coming to him! How much?"

"I don't know yet," said Mrs. Fisher. "I'll find out, though. Frank Hyland paid it."

"All right, Mom — I'll see Frank. You know — I kinda feel that nut's got something coming to him out of this thing."

"How d'you mean, Joe — he's got something coming?"

"Well — can you remember how he was talking about it, one time, like it was something he'd been working on? He'd forgotten it was I'd told him about it, and he'd got it all mixed up. And he said it was a formula to be added to the metal in its molten state instead of bein' applied externally. And that was what gave me the big idea. He didn't know a thing about it, really — but, just the same, it was that he said about adding the stuff to the molten metal that did the trick!"

"Well, but that's no credit to him, Joe," said Mrs. Fisher. "He just got it mixed up, like he does everything."

"I know that, Mom. But —"

"He was only blowin'—"

"I know, Mom. But I'd like to make him a little present, just the same —"

"Well, now, Joe, do you know what I'd do, if I was you? I'd find out what the fine was Frank Hyland paid for him, and pay that. But don't you give him any money, or he'll be goin' around from one room to another here in an automobile!"

"Oh, I guess it wouldn't be that much, Mom," said Joe. "But if it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have got as much as I did, either. You see, he —"

Aubrey, coming down the stairs, spied Joe.

"Hello, hello!" he cried. "Hello, there, Tommy Edison, Junior! What's the good word, Joe?"

"They came across, Aubrey! Hundred thousand advance — fifty per cent of the net!"

Aubrey's loud laugh filled the room.

"Signed on the dotted line!" he shouted. "Didn't I tell you to bluff them out?"

"Sure you did! I thought you'd gummed the game, Aubrey, but they fell for your line, all right!"

"Here, now — what's all this?" asked Mrs. Fisher.

"Why, Aubrey —" Joe began.

"One moment, if you please!" said Aubrey. "The kid from West Philly has the floor! I thank you! It's just this, Mother Fisher! I meant to see to it that the growing boy got his chance. So I saw Meyers and Stevens and told them what they'd have to do if they wanted to do business with us."

"And he told them, Mom," said Joe. "I'll tell the world he told them! They weren't going to give me but half of what they did — they doubled their offer after Aubrey talked to them!"

"It's a wonder they bought it at all!" said Mrs. Fisher. But she was impressed; she looked curiously at Aubrey, who had grown in size, somehow, while Joe talked. And Amy came down, just in time to realize that something was in the wind, and had to hear the whole story over.

Aubrey, for once, was quiet. He let Joe tell what he had done, while Amy listened, wide-eyed, and looked at him. Here was vindication. He'd shown them what he could do, when he had the chance!

And here all that was best in Aubrey shone through the strange crust of his vanity, his eagerness to show himself off. This was no personal triumph of his, so far as its results were con-

cerned. The money was to be Joe's, and the glory. But Aubrey was as glad as if one of those great schemes of his own, existing only in the fantasies of his imagination, had come to sudden fruit.

They couldn't understand him, of course. Amy couldn't, it was sure; in her eyes he needed no justification; he was perfect as he was. And the others couldn't see beyond the empty, shallow pride, and the boastfulness, and the loud talk. They couldn't see the stunted spirit, striving always to attain the stature of old dreams and old ambitions. They couldn't understand that he was always picturing himself as successful, important, prosperous, convinced, in his own mind, that he was only anticipating, by a little, results certain in the end to be achieved. They had no glimpse, even, of the land of fantasy, unreal, imaginative, in which he dwelt.

"He certainly put it over!" Joe said. "Aubrey — there's something coming to you out of this. I'll have to give you a little present —"

"You'll not give me any present, Joe!" said Aubrey. "You think about your mother —"

Amy turned suddenly toward the door. Clara was coming in. She was crying. But Frank Hyland was beside her, his eyes shining. And

they could all see that Clara's were happy tears.

"What's all this?" asked Frank Hyland. "Did you sell the formula, Joe?"

So again the story was told.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Clara. "And — Mom — Frank and I aren't going to stay — we —"

"Not going to stay? You've got to have supper, haven't you?" said Mrs. Fisher, sharply.

"We'll get a bite at the station, Mother," said Frank Hyland. "We — well, we're going to take a little trip to Atlantic City — a sort of second honeymoon. I've — well, I've had some things bothering me, and they're all straight now, and I met Clara outside and I was telling her, and — we want to have a little celebration —"

Aubrey's great laugh rang out. But, for once, no one minded.

"That's great!" said Joe. His eyes searched Clara's; went back, then, satisfied, to his mother. "I've got to beat it — I'm late now. I'll see you later, Aubrey — there's something coming to you, no kidding."

He hurried out. Clara kissed her mother; hugged Amy for a moment; then, impulsively, flung her arms about Aubrey and kissed him, too.

"You're a dear, at that, Aubrey!" she said. "You've done something for *us,* too — if you only knew it!"

She went out with Frank. Amy looked adoringly at her husband.

"Aubrey — you're wonderful!" she said. "Isn't he, Mom?"

Mrs. Fisher gave them a long, slow look.

"God help *me,* from now on!" she said.

THE END

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